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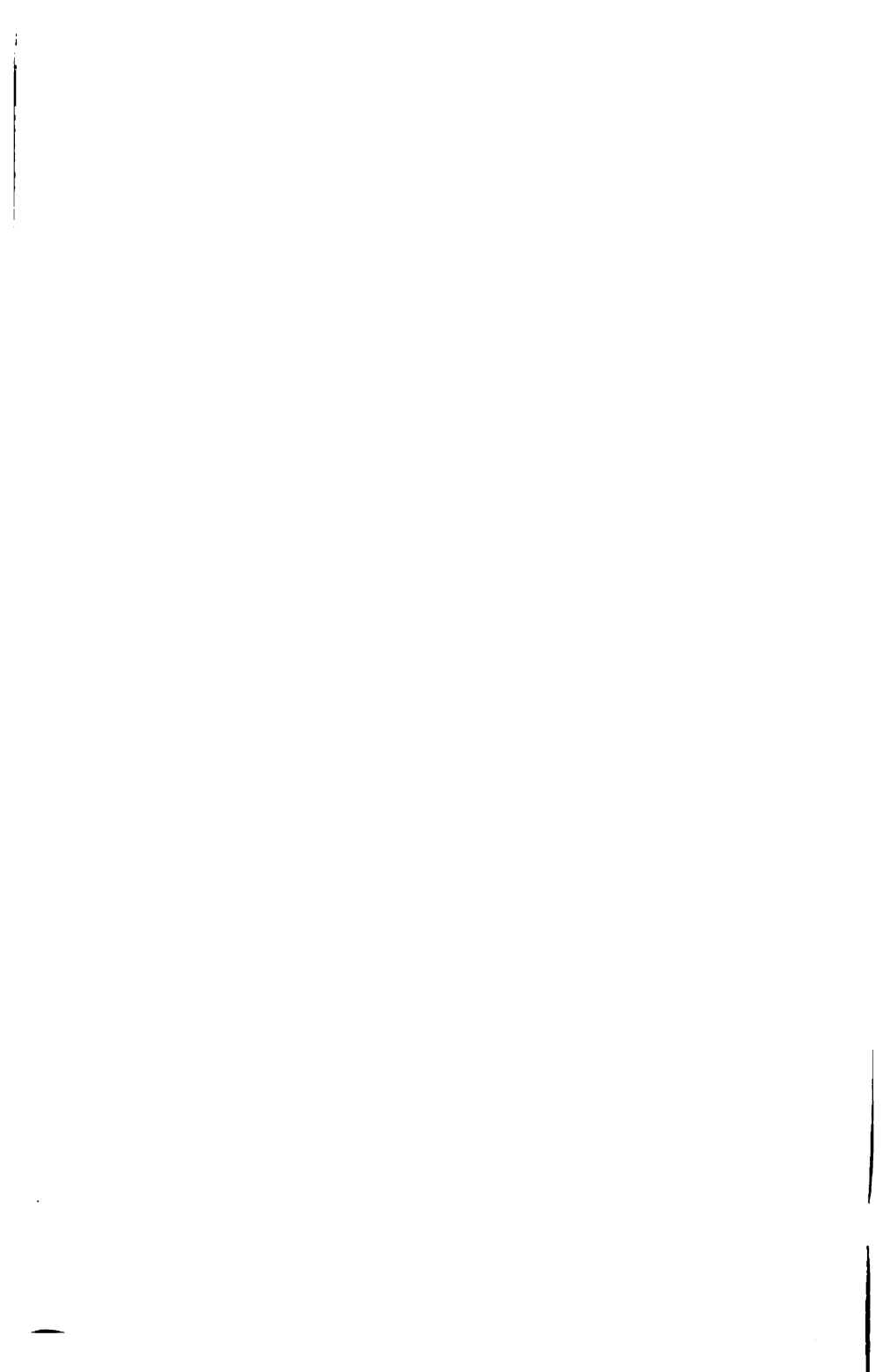
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*JOHN BUNYAN*





**HISTORY**  
**OF**  
**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**BY H. A. TAINE, D.C.L.**

**Translated from the French by H. Van Laun**

**One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy**

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# CONTENTS.—VOL. II

## PART I.

### BOOK II.—THE RENAISSANCE

#### CHAPTER III.

##### Ben Jonson.

	PAGE
I. The masters of the school, in the school and in their age—Jonson—His mood—Character—Education—First efforts—Struggles—Poverty—Sickness—Death . . . . .	1
II. Learning—Classical tastes—Didactic characters—Good management of his plots—Freedom and precision of his style—Vigour of his will and passion . . . . .	6
III. Dramas— <i>Catiline</i> and <i>Sejanus</i> —How he was able to depict the personages and the passions of the Roman decadence . . . . .	14
IV. Comedies—His reformation and theory of the theatre—Satirical comedies— <i>Volpone</i> —Why these comedies are serious and warlike—How they depict the passions of the Renaissance—His farces— <i>The Silent Woman</i> —Why these comedies are energetic and rude—How they conform with the tastes of the Renaissance . . . . .	21
V. Limits of his talent—Wherein he is inferior to Molière—Want of higher philosophy and comic	

	PAGE
gaiety—His imagination and Fancy— <i>The Staple of News</i> and <i>Oynthia's Revels</i> —How he treats the comedy of society, and lyrical comedy—His smaller poems—His masques—Theatrical and picturesque manners of the court— <i>The Sad Shepherd</i> —How Jonson remains a poet to his death . . . . .	38
VI. General idea of Shakspeare—The fundamental idea in Shakspeare—Conditions of human reason—Shakspeare's master faculty—Conditions of exact representation . . . . .	45

## CHAPTER IV.

## Shakspeare.

I. Life and character of Shakspeare—Family—Youth—Marriage—He becomes an actor— <i>Adonis</i> —Sonnets—Loves—Humour—Conversation—Melancholy—The constitution of the productive and sympathetic character—Prudence—Fortune—Retirement . . . . .	50
II. Style—Images—Excesses—Incongruities—Copiousness—Difference between the creative and analytic conception . . . . .	67
III. Manners—Familiar intercourse—Violent bearing—Harsh language—Conversation and action—Agreement of manners and style . . . . .	74
IV. The <i>dramatis personæ</i> —All of the same family—Brutes and idiots—Caliban, Ajax, Cloten, Polonius, the Nurse—How the mechanical imagination can precede or survive reason . . . . .	83
V. Men of wit—Difference between the wit of reasoners and of artists—Mercutio, Beatrice, Rosalind, Benedict, the clowns—Falstaff . . . . .	90

## CONTENTS.

vii

PAGE

<b>VI. Women</b> —Desdemona, Virginia, Juliet, Miranda, Imogen, Cordelia, Ophelia, Volumnia—How Shakspeare represents love—Why he bases virtue on instinct or passion . . . . .	96
<b>VII. Villains</b> —Iago, Richard III.—How excessive lusts and the lack of conscience are the natural province of the impassioned imagination . . . .	101
<b>VIII. Principal characters</b> —Excess and disease of the imagination—Lear, Othello, Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Macbeth, Hamlet—Comparison of Shakspeare's psychology with that of the French tragic authors . . . . .	104
<b>IX. Fancy</b> —Agreement of imagination with observation in Shakspeare—Interesting nature of sentimental and romantic comedy— <i>As you like it</i> —Idea of existence— <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> —Idea of love—Harmony of all parts of the work—Harmony between the artist and his work . . .	124

## CHAPTER V.

### *The Christian Renaissance.*

<b>I. Vices of the Pagan Renaissance</b> —Decay of the Southern civilisations . . . . .	142
<b>II. The Reformation</b> —Aptitude of the Germanic races, and suitability of Northern climates—Albert Durer's bodies and souls—His martyrdoms and last judgments—Luther—His idea of justice—Construction of Protestantism—Crisis of the conscience—Renewal of heart—Suppression of ceremonies—Transformation of the clergy . . .	148
<b>III. Reformation in England</b> —Tyranny of the ecclesiastical courts—Disorders of the clergy—Irritation of the people—The interior of a diocese—Perse-	

	PAGE
<p>cutions and convulsions—The translation of the Bible—How biblical events and Hebraic sentiments are in accordance with contemporary manners and with the English character—<i>The Prayer Book</i>—Moral and manly feeling of the prayers and church service—Preaching—Latimer—His education—Character—Familiar and persuasive eloquence—Death—The martyrs under Mary—England thenceforth Protestant . . .</p>	158
<p>IV. The Anglicans—Close connection between religion and society—How the religious sentiment penetrates literature—How the sentiment of the beautiful subsists in religion—Hooker—His breadth of mind and the fulness of his style—Hales and Chillingworth—Praise of reason and tolerance—Jeremy Taylor—His learning, imagination, and poetic feeling . . .</p>	186
<p>V. The Puritans—Opposition of religion and the world—Dogmas—Morality—Scruples—Their triumph and enthusiasm—Their work and practical sense . . .</p>	202
<p>VI. Bunyan—His life, spirit, and poetical work—The Prospect of Protestantism in England . . .</p>	221

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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### Volume II.

#### Part I.

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JOHN BUNYAN, . . . . .	Frontispiece.
SAMUEL JOHNSON, . . . . .	Page 3
JOHN KNOX, . . . . .	" 148
ARCHBISHOP CRANMER, . . . . .	" 159
BISHOP LATIMER, . . . . .	" 176
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY, . . . . .	" 193
JEREMY TAYLOR, . . . . .	" 202
HENRY HOWARD, (EARL OF SURREY) . . . . .	" 221





# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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## BOOK II.

### THE RENAISSANCE.

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#### CHAPTER III.

##### *Ben Jonson.*

##### I.

WHEN a new civilisation brings a new art to light, there are about a dozen men of talent who partly express the general idea, surrounding one or two men of genius who express it thoroughly. Guillen de Castro, Perez de Montalvan, Tirzo de Molina, Ruiz de Alarcon, Agustin Moreto, surrounding Calderon and Lope de Vega; Crayer, Van Oost, Rombouts, Van Thulden, Van Dyck, Honthorst, surrounding Rubens; Ford, Marlowe, Massinger, Webster, Beaumont, Fletcher, surrounding Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. The first constitute the chorus, the others are the leading men. They sing the same piece together, and at times the chorist is equal to the solo artist; but only at times. Thus, in the dramas which I have just referred to, the poet occasionally reaches the summit of his art, hits upon a complete character, a burst of sublime passion;

then he falls back, gropes amid qualified successes, rough sketches, feeble imitations, and at last takes refuge in the tricks of his trade. It is not in him, but in great men like Ben Jonson and Shakspeare, that we must look for the attainment of his idea and the fulness of his art. "Numerous were the wit-combats," says Fuller, "betwixt him (Shakspeare) and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakspeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention."<sup>1</sup> Such was Ben Jonson physically and morally, and his portraits do but confirm this just and animated outline: a vigorous, heavy, and uncouth person; a broad and long face, early disfigured by scurvy, a square jaw, large cheeks; his animal organs as much developed as those of his intellect: the sour aspect of a man in a passion or on the verge of a passion; to which add the body of an athlete, about forty years of age, "mountain belly, ungracious gait." Such was the outside, and the inside is like it. He was a genuine Englishman, big and coarsely framed, energetic, combative, proud, often morose, and prone to strange splenetic imaginations. He told Drummond that for a whole night he imagined "that he saw the Carthaginians and Romans fighting on his great toe."<sup>2</sup> Not that he is melancholic by nature; on the contrary, he loves to escape from him-

<sup>1</sup> Fuller's *Worthies*, ed. Nuttall, 1840, 3 vols. iii. 284.

<sup>2</sup> There is a similar hallucination to be met with in the life of Lord Castlereagh, who afterwards committed suicide.





*SAMUEL JOHNSON*



self by free and noisy, unbridled merriment, by copious and varied converse, assisted by good Canary wine, which he imbibes, and which ends by becoming a necessity to him. These great phlegmatic butchers' frames require a generous liquor to give them a tone, and to supply the place of the sun which they lack. Expansive moreover, hospitable, even lavish, with a frank imprudent spirit,<sup>1</sup> making him forget himself wholly before Drummond, his Scotch host, an over rigid and malicious pedant, who has marred his ideas and vilified his character.<sup>2</sup> What we know of his life is in harmony with his person: he suffered much, fought much, dared much. He was studying at Cambridge, when his stepfather, a bricklayer, recalled him, and taught him to use the trowel. He ran away, enlisted as a common soldier, and served in the English army, at that time engaged against the Spaniards in the Low Countries, killed and despoiled a man in single combat, "in the view of both armies." He was a man of bodily action, and he exercised his limbs in early life.<sup>3</sup> On his return to England, at the age of nineteen, he went on the stage for his livelihood, and occupied himself also in touching up dramas. Having been challenged, he fought a duel, was seriously wounded, but killed

<sup>1</sup> His character lies between those of Fielding and Dr. Johnson.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. David Laing remarks, however, in Drummond's defence, that as "Jonson died August 6, 1637, Drummond survived till December 4, 1649, and no portion of these Notes (Conversations) were made public till 1711, or sixty-two years after Drummond's death, and seventy-four after Jonson's, which renders quite nugatory all Gifford's accusations of Drummond's having published them 'without shame.' As to Drummond decoying Jonson under his roof with any premeditated design on his reputation, as Mr. Campbell has remarked, no one can seriously believe it."—*Archæologica Scotica*, vol. iv. page 243.—*Tr.*

<sup>3</sup> At the age of forty-four he went to Scotland on foot.

his adversary; for this he was cast into prison, and found himself "nigh the gallows." A catholic priest visited and converted him; quitting his prison penniless, at twenty years of age, he married. At last, four years later, his first successful play was acted. Children came, he must earn bread for them; and he was not inclined to follow the beaten track to the end, being persuaded that a fine philosophy—a special nobleness and dignity—ought to be introduced into comedy,—that it was necessary to follow the example of the ancients, to imitate their severity and their accuracy, to be above the theatrical racket and the common improbabilities in which the vulgar delighted. He openly proclaimed his intention in his prefaces, sharply railed at his rivals, proudly set forth on the stage<sup>1</sup> his doctrines, his morality, his character. He thus made bitter enemies, who defamed him outrageously and before their audiences, whom he exasperated by the violence of his satires, and against whom he struggled without intermission to the end. He did more, he constituted himself a judge of the public corruption, sharply attacked the reigning vices, "fearing no strumpet's drugs, nor ruffian's stab."<sup>2</sup> He treated his hearers like schoolboys, and spoke to them always like a censor and a master. If necessary, he ventured further. His companions, Marston and Chapman, had been committed to prison for some reflections on the Scotch in one of their pieces called "Eastward-Hoe;" and the report spreading that they were in danger of losing their noses and ears, Jonson, who had written part of the piece, voluntarily surrendered himself a prisoner, and obtained

<sup>1</sup> *Parts of Crites and Asper.*

<sup>2</sup> *Every Man out of his Humour.* i.; Gifford's *Jonson*, p. 80.



their pardon. On his return, amid the feasting and rejoicing, his mother showed him a violent poison which she intended to put into his drink, to save him from the execution of the sentence; and "to show that she was not a coward," adds Jonson, "she had resolved to drink first." We see that in vigorous actions he found examples in his own family. Toward the end of his life, money was scarce with him; he was liberal, improvident; his pockets always had holes in them, and his hand was always ready to give; though he had written a vast quantity, he was still obliged to write in order to live. Paralysis came on, his scurvy became worse, dropsy set in. He could not leave his room, nor walk without assistance. His last plays did not succeed. In the epilogue to the *New Inn* he says:

"If you expect more than you had to-night,  
The maker is sick and sad. . . .  
All that his faint and falt'ring tongue doth crave,  
Is, that you not impute it to his brain,  
That's yet unhurt, altho' set round with pain,  
It cannot long hold out."

His enemies brutally insulted him:

"Thy Pegasus . . .  
He had bequeathed his belly unto thee,  
To hold that little learning which is fled  
Into thy guts from out thy empty head."

Inigo Jones, his colleague, deprived him of the patronage of the court. He was obliged to beg a supply of money from the Lord Treasurer, then from the Earl of Newcastle:

"Disease, the enemy, and his engineers,  
Want, with the rest of his concealed compeers,  
Have cast a trench about me, now five years. . . .  
The muse not peeps out, one of hundred days ;  
But lies blocked up and straitened, narrowed in,  
Fixed to the bed and boards, unlike to win  
Health, or scarce breath, as she had never been." <sup>1</sup>

His wife and children were dead ; he lived alone, forsaken, waited on by an old woman. Thus almost always sadly and miserably, is dragged out and ends the last act of the human comedy. After so many years, after so many sustained efforts, amid so much glory and genius, we find a poor shattered body, drivelling and suffering, between a servant and a priest.

## II.

This is the life of a combatant, bravely endured, worthy of the seventeenth century by its crosses and its energy ; courage and force abounded throughout. Few writers have laboured more, and more conscientiously ; his knowledge was vast, and in this age of eminent scholars he was one of the best classics of his time, as deep as he was accurate and thorough, having studied the most minute details and understood the true spirit of ancient life. It was not enough for him to have stored his mind from the best writers, to have their whole works continually in his mind, to scatter his pages whether he would or no, with recollections of them. He dug into the orators, critics, scholiasts, grammarians, and compilers of inferior rank ; he picked up

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson's *Poems*, ed. Bell, *An Epistle Mendicant*, to Richard, Lord Weston, Lord High Treasurer (1631), p. 244.

stray fragments ; he took characters, jokes, refinements, from Athenæus, Libanius, Philostratus. He had so well entered into and digested the Greek and Latin ideas, that they were incorporated with his own. They enter into his speech without incongruity ; they spring forth in him as vigorous as at their first birth ; he originates even when he remembers. On every subject he had this thirst for knowledge, and this gift of mastering knowledge. He knew alchemy when he wrote the *Alchemist*. He is familiar with alembics, retorts, receivers, as if he had passed his life seeking after the philosopher's stone. He explains incineration, calcination, imbibition, rectification, reverberation, as well as Agrippa and Paracelsus. If he speaks of cosmetics,<sup>1</sup> he brings out a shopful of them ; we might make out of his plays a dictionary of the oaths and costumes of courtiers ; he seems to have a specialty in all branches. A still greater proof of his force is, that his learning in nowise mars his vigour ; heavy as is the mass with which he loads himself, he carries it without stooping. This wonderful mass of reading and observation suddenly begins to move, and falls like a mountain on the overwhelmed reader. We must hear Sir Epicure Mammon unfold the vision of splendours and debauchery, in which he means to plunge, when he has learned to make gold. The refined and unchecked impurities of the Roman decadence, the splendid obscenities of Heliogabalus, the gigantic fancies of luxury and lewdness, tables of gold spread with foreign dainties, draughts of dissolved pearls, nature devastated to provide a single dish, the many crimes committed by sensuality against nature, reason, and justice, the delight in defying and

<sup>1</sup> *The Devil is an Ass.*

outraging law,—all these images pass before the eyes with the dash of a torrent and the force of a great river. Phrase follows phrase without intermission, ideas and facts crowd into the dialogue to paint a situation, to give clearness to a character, produced from this deep memory, directed by this solid logic, launched by this powerful reflection. It is a pleasure to see him advance weighted with so many observations and recollections, loaded with technical details and learned reminiscences, without deviation or pause, a genuine literary Leviathan, like the war elephants which used to bear towers, men, weapons, machines, on their backs, and ran as swiftly with their freight as a nimble steed.

In the great dash of this heavy attempt, he finds a path which suits him. He has his style. Classical erudition and education made him a classic, and he writes like his Greek models and his Roman masters. The more we study the Latin races and literatures in contrast with the Teutonic, the more fully we become convinced that the proper and distinctive gift of the first is the art of development, that is, of drawing up ideas in continuous rows, according to the rules of rhetoric and eloquence, by studied transitions, with regular progress, without shock or bounds. Jonson received from his acquaintance with the ancients the habit of decomposing ideas, unfolding them bit by bit in natural order, making himself understood and believed. From the first thought to the final conclusion, he conducts the reader by a continuous and uniform ascent. The track never fails with him as with Shakspeare. He does not advance like the rest by abrupt intuitions, but by consecutive deductions ; we can walk with him without need of bounding, and we are continually kept upon the

straight path : antithesis of words unfolds antithesis of thoughts ; symmetrical phrases guide the mind through difficult ideas ; they are like barriers set on either side of the road to prevent our falling into the ditch. We do not meet on our way extraordinary, sudden, gorgeous images, which might dazzle or delay us ; we travel on, enlightened by moderate and sustained metaphors. Jonson has all the methods of Latin art ; even, when he wishes it, especially on Latin subjects, he has the last and most erudite, the brilliant conciseness of Seneca and Lucan, the squared equipoised, filed off antithesis, the most happy and studied artifices of oratorical architecture.<sup>1</sup> Other poets are nearly visionaries ; Jonson is almost a logician.

Hence his talent, his successes, and his faults : if he has a better style and better plots than the others, he is not, like them, a creator of souls. He is too much of a theorist, too preoccupied by rules. His argumentative habits spoil him when he seeks to shape and motion complete and living men. No one is capable of fashioning these unless he possesses, like Shakspeare, the imagination of a seer. The human being is so complex that the logician who perceives his different elements in succession can hardly study them all, much less gather them all in one flash, so as to produce the dramatic response or action in which they are concentrated and which should manifest them. To discover such actions and responses, we need a kind of inspiration and fever. Then the mind works as in a dream. The characters move within the poet, almost involuntarily : he waits for them to speak, he remains motionless, hearing their voices, wholly wrapt in contemplation, in

<sup>1</sup> *Sejanus, Catilina, passim.*

order that he may not disturb the inner drama which they are about to act in his soul. That is his artifice: to let them alone. He is quite astonished at their discourse; as he observes them, he forgets that it is he who invents them. Their mood, character, education, disposition of mind, situation, attitude, and actions, form within him so well-connected a whole, and so readily unite into palpable and solid beings, that he dares not attribute to his reflection or reasoning a creation so vast and speedy. Beings are organised in him as in nature, that is, of themselves, and by a force which the combinations of his art could not replace.<sup>1</sup> Jonson has nothing wherewith to replace it but these combinations of art. He chooses a general idea—cunning, folly, severity—and makes a person out of it. This person is called Crites, Asper, Sordido, Deliro, Pecunia, Subtil, and the transparent name indicates the logical process which produced it. The poet took an abstract quality, and putting together all the actions to which it may give rise, trots it out on the stage in a man's dress. His characters, like those of la Bruyère and Theophrastus, were hammered out of solid deductions. Now it is a vice selected from the catalogue of moral philosophy, sensuality thirsting for gold: this perverse double inclination becomes a personage, Sir Epicure Mammon; before the alchemist, before the *famulus*, before his friend, before his mistress, in public or alone, all his words denote a greed of pleasure and of gold, and they express nothing more.<sup>2</sup> Now it is a mania

<sup>1</sup> Alfred de Musset, preface to *La Coupe et les Lèvres*. Plato: *Ion*.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Sir Epicure Mammon with Baron Hulot from Balzac's *Cousine Bette*. Balzac, who is learned like Jonson, creates real beings like Shakspeare.

gathered from the old sophists, a babbling with horror of noise; this form of mental pathology becomes a personage, Morose; the poet has the air of a doctor who has undertaken to record exactly all the desires of speech, all the necessities of silence, and to record nothing else. Now he picks out a ridicule, an affectation, a species of folly, from the manners of the dandies and the courtiers; a mode of swearing, an extravagant style, a habit of gesticulating, or any other oddity contracted by vanity or fashion. The hero whom he covers with these eccentricities, is overloaded by them. He disappears beneath his enormous trappings; he drags them about with him everywhere; he cannot get rid of them for an instant. We no longer see the man under the dress; he is like a mannikin, oppressed under a cloak, too heavy for him. Sometimes, doubtless, his habits of geometrical construction produce personages almost life-like. Bobadil, the grave boaster; Captain Tucca, the begging bully, inventive buffoon, ridiculous talker; Amorphus the traveller, a pedantic doctor of good manners, laden with eccentric phrases, create as much illusion as we can wish; but it is because they are fitting comicalities and low characters. It is not necessary for a poet to study such creatures; it is enough that he discovers in them three or four leading features; it is of little consequence if they always present themselves with the same attitudes; they produce laughter, like the *Countess d'Escarbagnas* or any of the *Facheux* in Molière; we want nothing else of them. On the contrary, the others weary and repel us. They are stage-masks, not living figures. Having acquired a fixed expression, they persist to the end of the piece in their unvarying grimace or their eternal frown. A

man is not an abstract passion. He stamps the vices and virtues which he possesses with his individual mark. These vices and virtues receive, on entering into him, a bent and form which they have not in others. No one is unmixed sensuality. Take a thousand sensualists, and you will find a thousand different modes of sensuality; for there are a thousand paths, a thousand circumstances and degrees, in sensuality. If Jonson wanted to make Sir Epicure Mammon a real being, he should have given him the kind of disposition, the species of education, the manner of imagination, which produce sensuality. When we wish to construct a man, we must dig down to the foundations of mankind; that is, we must define to ourselves the structure of his bodily machine, and the primitive gait of his mind. Jonson has not dug sufficiently deep, and his constructions are incomplete; he has built on the surface, and he has built but a single story. He was not acquainted with the whole man, and he ignored man's basis; he put on the stage and gave a representation of moral treatises, fragments of history, scraps of satire; he did not stamp new beings on the imagination of mankind.

He possesses all other gifts, and in particular the classical; first of all, the talent for composition. For the first time we see a connected, well-contrived plot, a complete intrigue, with its beginning, middle, and end; subordinate actions well arranged, well combined; an interest which grows and never flags; a leading truth which all the events tend to demonstrate; a ruling idea which all the characters unite to illustrate; in short, an art like that which Molière and Racine were about to apply and teach. He does not, like Shak-



speare, take a novel from Greene, a chronicle from Holinshed, a life from Plutarch, such as they are, to cut them into scenes, irrespective of likelihood, indifferent as to order and unity, caring only to set up men, at times wandering into poetic reveries, at need finishing up the piece abruptly with a recognition or a butchery. He governs himself and his characters; he wills and he knows all that they do, and all that he does. But beyond his habits of Latin regularity, he possesses the great faculty of his age and race,—the sentiment of nature and existence, the exact knowledge of precise detail, the power in frankly and boldly handling frank passions. This gift is not wanting in any writer of the time; they do not fear words that are true, shocking, and striking details of the bedchamber or medical study; the prudery of modern England and the refinement of monarchical France veil not the nudity of their figures, or dim the colouring of their pictures. They live freely, amply, amidst living things; they see the ins and outs of lust raging without any feeling of shame, hypocrisy, or palliation; and they exhibit it as they see it, Jonson as boldly as the rest, occasionally more boldly than the rest, strengthened as he is by the vigour and ruggedness of his athletic temperament, by the extraordinary exactness and abundance of his observations and his knowledge. Add also his moral loftiness, his asperity, his powerful chiding wrath, exasperated and bitter against vice, his will strengthened by pride and by conscience:

“ With an armed and resolved hand,  
I'll strip the ragged follies of the time  
Naked as at their birth . . . and with a whip of steel,  
Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.

I fear no mood stamp't in a private brow,  
 When I am pleas'd t' unmask a public vice.  
 I fear no strumpet's drugs, nor ruffian's stab,  
 Should I detect their hateful luxuries ;"<sup>1</sup>

above all, a scorn of base compliance, an open disdain  
 for

"Those jaded wits  
 That run a broken pace for common hire,"—<sup>2</sup>

an enthusiasm, or deep love of

"A happy muse,  
 Borne on the wings of her immortal thought,  
 That kicks at earth with a disdainful heel,  
 And beats at heaven gates with her bright hoofs."<sup>3</sup>

Such are the energies which he brought to the drama  
 and to comedy ; they were great enough to ensure him  
 a high and separate position.

### III.

For whatever Jonson undertakes, whatever be his  
 faults, haughtiness, rough-handling, predilection for  
 morality and the past, antiquarian and censorious  
 instincts, he is never little or dull. It signifies nothing  
 that in his Latinised tragedies, *Sejanus*, *Catiline*, he is  
 fettered by the worship of the old worn models of the  
 Roman decadence ; nothing that he plays the scholar,  
 manufactures Ciceronian harangues, hauls in choruses  
 imitated from Seneca, holds forth in the style of Lucan  
 and the rhetors of the empire ; he more than once  
 attains a genuine accent ; through his pedantry, heaviness,  
 literary adoration of the ancients, nature forces its

<sup>1</sup> *Every Man out of his Humour*, Prologue.

<sup>2</sup> *Postaster*, i. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

way ; he lights, at his first attempt, on the crudities, horrors, gigantic lewdness, shameless depravity of imperial Rome ; he takes in hand and sets in motion the lusts and ferocities, the passions of courtesans and princesses, the daring of assassins and of great men, which produced Messalina, Agrippina, Catiline, Tiberius.<sup>1</sup> In the Rome which he places before us we go boldly and straight to the end ; justice and pity oppose no barriers. Amid these customs of victors and slaves, human nature is upset ; corruption and villany are held as proofs of insight and energy. Observe how, in *Sejanus*, assassination is plotted and carried out with marvellous coolness. Livia discusses with Sejanus the methods of poisoning her husband, in a clear style, without circumlocution, as if the subject were how to gain a lawsuit or to serve up a dinner. There are no equivocations, no hesitation, no remorse in the Rome of Tiberius. Glory and virtue consist in power ; scruples are for base minds ; the mark of a lofty heart is to desire all and to dare all. Macro says rightly :

“ Men’s fortune there is virtue ; reason their will ;  
Their license, law ; and their observance, skill.  
Occasion is their foil ; conscience, their stain ;  
Profit, their lustre ; and what else is, vain.”<sup>2</sup>

Sejanus addresses Livia thus :

“ Royal lady, . . .  
Yet, now I see your wisdom, judgment, strength,  
Quickness, and will, to apprehend the means  
To your own good and greatness, I protest  
Myself through rarified, and turn’d all flame  
In your affection.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the second Act of *Catiline*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus*, iii. last Scene.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii.

These are the loves of the wolf and his mate; he praises her for being so ready to kill. And observe in one moment the morals of a prostitute appear behind the manners of the poisoner. Sejanus goes out, and immediately, like a courtesan, Livia turns to her physician, saying:

"How do I look to-day?

*Eudemus.* Excellent clear, believe it. This same fucus was well laid on.

*Livia.* Methinks 'tis here not white.

*E.* Lend me your scarlet, lady. 'Tis the sun Hath giv'n some little taint unto the ceruse, You should have us'd of the white oil I gave you. Sejanus, for your love! His very name Commandeth above Cupid or his shafts. . . .

[*Paints her cheeks.*]

"Tis now well, lady, you should Use of the dentifrice I prescrib'd you too, To clear your teeth, and the prepar'd pomatum, To smooth the skin. A lady cannot be Too curious of her form, that still would hold The heart of such a person, made her captive, As you have his: who, to endear him more In your clear eye, hath put away his wife . . . Fair Apicata, and made spacious room To your new pleasures.

*L.* Have not we return'd That with our hate to Drusus, and discovery Of all his counsels? . . .

*E.* When will you take some physic, lady?

*L.*

I shall, Eudemus: but let Drusus' drug Be first prepar'd.

*E.* Were Lygdus made, that's done. . . I'll send you a perfume, first to resolve

When

And procure sweat, and then prepare a bath  
 To cleanse and clear the cutis ; against when  
 I'll have an excellent new fucus made  
 Resistive 'gainst the sun, the rain or wind,  
 Which you shall lay on with a breath or oil,  
 As you best like, and last some fourteen hours.  
 This change came timely, lady, for your health."<sup>1</sup>

He ends by congratulating her on her approaching change of husbands ; Drusus was injuring her complexion ; Sejanus is far preferable ; a physiological and practical conclusion. The Roman apothecary kept on the same shelf his medicine-chest, his chest of cosmetics, and his box of poisons.<sup>2</sup>

After this we find one after another all the scenes of Roman life unfolded, the bargain of murder, the comedy of justice, the shamelessness of flattery, the anguish and vacillation of the senate. When Sejanus wishes to buy a conscience, he questions, jokes, plays round the offer he is about to make, throws it out as if in pleasantry, so as to be able to withdraw it, if need be ; then, when the intelligent look of the rascal, whom he is trafficking with, shows that he is understood :

"Protest not,  
 Thy looks are vows to me. . . .  
 Thou art a man, made to make consuls. Go."<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere, the senator Latiaris in his own house storms before his friend Sabinus, against tyranny, openly expresses a desire for liberty, provoking him to speak.

<sup>1</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus*, ii.

<sup>2</sup> See *Catiline*, Act ii. ; a very fine scene, no less plain spoken and animated, on the dissipation of the higher ranks in Rome.

<sup>3</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus*, i.

Then two spies who were hid "between the roof and ceiling," cast themselves on Sabinus, crying, "Treason to Cæsar!" and drag him, with his face covered, before the tribunal, thence to "be thrown upon the Gemonies."<sup>1</sup> So, when the senate is assembled, Tiberius has chosen beforehand the accusers of Silius, and their parts distributed to them. They mumble in a corner, whilst aloud is heard, in the emperor's presence :

"Cæsar,  
Live long and happy, great and royal Cæsar ;  
The gods preserve thee and thy modesty,  
Thy wisdom and thy innocence. . . .  
Guard  
His meekness, Jove, his piety, his care,  
His bounty."<sup>2</sup>

Then the herald cites the accused ; Varro, the consul, pronounces the indictment ; Afer hurls upon them his bloodthirsty eloquence : the senators get excited ; we see laid bare, as in Tacitus and Juvenal, the depths of Roman servility, hypocrisy, insensibility, the venomous craft of Tiberius. At last, after so many others, the turn of Sejanus comes. The fathers anxiously assemble in the temple of Apollo ; for some days past Tiberius has seemed to be trying to contradict himself ; one day he appoints the friends of his favourite to high places, and the next day sets his enemies in eminent positions. The senators mark the face of Sejanus, and know not what to anticipate ; Sejanus is troubled, then after a moment's cringing is more arrogant than ever. The plots are confused, the rumours contradictory. Macro alone is in the confidence of Tiberius, and soldiers are

<sup>1</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus*, iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii.

seen, drawn up at the porch of the temple, ready to enter at the slightest commotion. The formula of convocation is read, and the council marks the names of those who do not respond to the summons; then Regulus addresses them, and announces that Cæsar

“Propounds to this grave senate, the bestowing  
Upon the man he loves, honour'd Sejanus,  
The tribunitial dignity and power :  
Here are his letters, signed with his signet.  
What pleaseth now the Fathers to be done ?”

“*Senators.* Read, read them, open, publicly read them.

*Cotta.* Cæsar hath honour'd his own greatness much

In thinking of this act.

*Trio.*

It was a thought

Happy, and worthy Cæsar.

*Laticaris.*

And the lord

As worthy it, on whom it is directed !

*Haterius.* Most worthy !

*Sanguinius.* Rome did never boast the virtue

That could give envy bounds, but his : Sejanus—

*1st Sen.* Honour'd and noble !

*2d Sen.* Good and great Sejanus !

*Præcones.* Silence !”<sup>1</sup>

Tiberius' letter is read. First, long obscure and vague phrases, mingled with indirect protestations and accusations, foreboding something and revealing nothing. Suddenly comes an insinuation against Sejanus. The fathers are alarmed, but the next line reassures them. A word or two further on, the same insinuation is repeated with greater exactness. “Some there be that would interpret this his public severity to be particular ambition; and that, under a pretext of service to

<sup>1</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus, v.*

us, he doth but remove his own lets: alleging the strengths he hath made to himself, by the prætorian soldiers, by his faction in court and senate, by the offices he holds himself, and confers on others, his popularity and dependents, his urging (and almost driving) us to this our unwilling retirement, and lastly, his aspiring to be our son-in-law." The fathers rise: "This is strange!" Their eager eyes are fixed on the letter, on Sejanus, who perspires and grows pale; their thoughts are busy with conjectures, and the words of the letter fall one by one, amidst a sepulchral silence, caught up as they fall with all devouring and attentive eagerness. The senators anxiously weigh the value of these shift expressions, fearing to compromise themselves with the favourite or with the prince, all feeling that they must understand, if they value their lives.

"*Your wisdoms, conscript fathers, are able to examine, and censure these suggestions. But, were they left to our absolving voice, we durst pronounce them, as we think them, most malicious.*"

*Senator.* O, he has restor'd all; list.

*Præco.* 'Yet are they offered to be averr'd, and on the lives of the informers.'"<sup>1</sup>

At this word the letter becomes menacing. Those next Sejanus forsake him. "Sit farther. . . . Let's remove!" The heavy Sanquinius leaps panting over the benches. The soldiers come in; then Macro. And now, at last, the letter orders the arrest of Sejanus.

"*Regulus.* Take him hence;  
And all the gods guard Cæsar!

*Trio.* Take him hence.

*Haterius.* Hence.

<sup>1</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus, v.*



*Cotta.* To the dungeon with him.

*Sanquinus.* He deserves it.

*Senator.* Crown all our doors with bays.

*Sen.* And let an ox,  
With gilded horns and garlands, straight be led  
Unto the Capitol.

*Hat.* And sacrific'd  
To Jove, for Cæsar's safety.

*Tri.* All our gods  
Be present still to Cæsar ! . . .

*Cot.* Let all the traitor's titles be defac'd.

*Tri.* His images and statues be pull'd down. . . .

*Sen.* Liberty, liberty, liberty ! Lead on,  
And praise to Macro that hath saved Rome !"<sup>1</sup>

It is the baying of a furious pack of hounds, let loose at last on him, under whose hand they had crouched, and who had for a long time beaten and bruised them. Jonson discovered in his own energetic soul the energy of these Roman passions ; and the clearness of his mind, added to his profound knowledge, powerless to construct characters, furnished him with general ideas and striking incidents, which suffice to depict manners.

#### IV.

Moreover, it was to this that he turned his talent. Nearly all his work consists of comedies, not sentimental and fanciful as Shakspeare's, but imitative and satirical, written to represent and correct follies and vices. He introduced a new model ; he had a doctrine ; his masters were Terence and Plautus. He observes the unity of time and place, almost exactly. He ridicules the authors who, in the same play,

<sup>1</sup> *The Fall of Sejanus*, v.

" Make a child now swaddled, to proceed  
 Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed,  
 Past threescore years ; or, with three rusty swords,  
 And help of some few foot and half-foot words,  
 Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars. . . .  
 He rather prays you will be pleas'd to see."<sup>1</sup>

He wishes to represent on the stage

" One such to-day, as other plays shou'd be ;  
 Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,  
 Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please :  
 Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeard  
 The gentlewomen. . . .  
 But deeds, and language, such as men do use. . . .  
 You, that have so grac'd monsters, may like men."<sup>2</sup>

Men, as we see them in the streets, with their whims  
 and humours—

" When some one peculiar quality  
 Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw  
 All his affects, his spirits, and his powers  
 In their confusions, all to run one way,  
 This may be truly said to be a humour."<sup>3</sup>

It is these humours which he exposes to the light, not  
 with the artist's curiosity, but with the moralist's hate :

" I will scourge those apes,  
 And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror,  
 As large as is the stage whereon we act ;  
 Where they shall see the time's deformity  
 Anatomized in every nerve, and sinew,  
 With constant courage, and contempt of fear. . . .

My strict hand  
 Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe

<sup>1</sup> *Every Man in his Humour*, Prologue.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Squeeze out the humour of such spongy souls,  
As lick up every idle vanity."<sup>1</sup>

Doubtless a determination so strong and decided does violence to the dramatic spirit. Jonson's comedies are not rarely harsh; his characters are too grotesque, laboriously constructed, mere automatons; the poet thought less of producing living beings than of scotching a vice; the scenes get arranged, or are confused together in a mechanical manner; we see the process, we feel the satirical intention throughout; delicate and easy-flowing imitation is absent, as well as the graceful fancy which abounds in Shakspeare. But if Jonson comes across harsh passions, visibly evil and vile, he will derive from his energy and wrath the talent to render them odious and visible, and will produce a *Volpone*, a sublime work, the sharpest picture of the manners of the age, in which is displayed the full brightness of evil lusts, in which lewdness, cruelty, love of gold, shamelessness of vice, display a sinister yet splendid poetry, worthy of one of Titian's bacchanals.<sup>2</sup> All this makes itself apparent in the first scene, when Volpone says:

"Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!—  
Open the shrine, that I may see my saint."

This saint is his piles of gold, jewels, precious plate:

"Hail the world's soul, and mine! . . . O thou son of Sol,  
But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,  
With adoration, thee, and every relick  
Of sacred treasure in this blessed room."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Every Man out of his Humour*, Prologue.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *Volpone* with Regnard's *Légaltaire*; the end of the sixteenth with the beginning of the eighteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> *Volpone*, i. 1.

Presently after, the dwarf, the eunuch, and the hermaphrodite of the house sing a sort of pagan and fantastic interlude; they chant in strange verses the metamorphoses of the hermaphrodite, who was first the soul of Pythagoras. We are at Venice, in the palace of the magnifico Volpone. These deformed creatures, the splendour of gold, this strange and poetical buffoonery, carry the thought immediately to the sensual city, queen of vices and of arts.

The rich Volpone lives like an ancient Greek or Roman. Childless and without relatives, playing the invalid, he makes all his flatterers hope to be his heir, receives their gifts,

“ Letting the cherry knock against their lips,  
And draw it by their mouths, and back again.”<sup>1</sup>

Glad to have their gold, but still more glad to deceive them, artistic in wickedness as in avarice, and just as pleased to look at a contortion of suffering as at the sparkle of a ruby.

The advocate Voltore arrives, bearing a “ huge piece of plate.” Volpone throws himself on his bed, wraps himself in furs, heaps up his pillows, and coughs as if at the point of death :

“ *Volpone*. I thank you, signior Voltore,  
Where is the plate ? mine eyes are bad. . . . Your love  
Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswer’d . . .  
I cannot now last long. . . I feel me going,—  
Uh, uh, uh, uh ! ”<sup>2</sup>

He closes his eyes, as though exhausted :

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 2.

"*Voltore*. Am I inscrib'd his heir for certain ?

*Mosca* (*Volpone's Parasite*). Are you !

I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe  
To write me in your family. All my hopes  
Depend upon your worship : I am lost,  
Except the rising sun do shine on me.

*Volt.* It shall both shine and warm thee, *Mosca*.

*M.* Sir,

I am man, that hath not done your love  
All the worst offices : here I wear your keys,  
See all your coffers and your caskets lock'd,  
Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,  
Your plate and monies ; am your steward, sir,  
Husband your goods here.

*Volt.* But am I sole heir ?

*M.* Without a partner, sir ; confirm'd this morning :  
The wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry  
Upon the parchment.

*Volt.* Happy, happy, me !

By what good chance, sweet *Mosca* ?

*M.* Your desert, sir ;

I know no second cause."<sup>1</sup>

And he details the abundance of the wealth in which *Voltore* is about to revel, the gold which is to pour upon him, the opulence which is to flow in his house as a river :

"When will you have your inventory brought, sir ?  
Or see a copy of the will ?"

The imagination is fed with precise words, precise details. Thus, one after another, the would-be heirs come like beasts of prey. The second who arrives is an old miser, *Corbaccio*, deaf, "impotent," almost dying,

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, i. 3.

who nevertheless hopes to survive Volpone. To make more sure of it, he would fain have Mosca give his master a narcotic. He has it about him, this excellent opiate: he has had it prepared under his own eyes, he suggests it. His joy on finding Volpone more ill than himself is bitterly humorous:

*"Corbaccio.* How does your patron? . . .

*Mosca.*

His mouth

Is ever gaping, and his eyelids hang.

*O.* Good.

*M.* A freezing numbness stiffens all his joints,  
And makes the colour of his flesh like lead.

*O.* 'Tis good.

*M.* His pulse beats slow, and dull.

*O.*

Good symptoms still.

*M.* And from his brain—

*O.*

I conceive you; good.

*M.* Flows a cold sweat, with a continual rheum,  
Forth the resolved corners of his eyes.

*O.* Is't possible? Yet I am better, ha!

How does he, with the swimming of his head?

*M.* O, sir, 'tis past the scotomy; he now  
Hath lost his feeling, and hath left to snort:  
You hardly can perceive him, that he breathes.

*O.* Excellent, excellent! sure I shall outlast him:

This makes me young again, a score of years."<sup>1</sup>

If you would be his heir, says Mosca, the moment is favourable; but you must not let yourself be forestalled. Voltore has been here, and presented him with this piece of plate:

*"O.*

See, Mosca, look,

Here, I have brought a bag of bright chequines,

Will quite weigh down his plate . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, I. 4.

*M.* Now, would I counsel you, make home with speed ;  
There, frame a will ; whereto you shall inscribe  
My master your sole heir. . . .

*C.* This plot

Did I think on before. . . .

*M.* And you so certain to survive him—

*C.* Ay.

*M.* Being so lusty a man—

*C.* 'Tis true." <sup>1</sup>

And the old man hobbles away, not hearing the insults  
and ridicule thrown at him, he is so deaf.

When he is gone the merchant Corvino arrives,  
bringing an orient pearl and a splendid diamond :

" *Corvino.* Am I his heir ?

*Mosca.* Sir, I am sworn, I may not show the will  
Till he be dead ; but here has been Corbaccio,  
Here has been Voltore, here were others too,  
I cannot number 'em, they were so many ;  
All gaping here for legacies : but I,  
Taking the vantage of his naming you,  
*Signior Corvino, Signior Corvino,* took  
Paper, and pen, and ink, and there I asked him,  
Whom he would have his heir ? *Corvino.* Who  
Should be executor ? *Corvino.* And,  
To any question he was silent to,  
I still interpreted the nods he made,  
Through weakness, for consent : and sent home th' others,  
Nothing bequeath'd them, but to cry and curse.

*Cor.* O my dear *Mosca* ! . . . Has he children ?

*M.* Bastards,  
Some dozen, or more, that he begot on beggars,  
Gypsies, and Jews, and black-moors, when he was drunk. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Vulpone*, i. 4.

Speak out :

You may be louder yet. . . .

Faith, I could stifle him rarely with a pillow,  
As well as any woman that should keep him.

*C.* Do as you will ; but I'll begone."<sup>1</sup>

Corvino presently departs ; for the passions of the time have all the beauty of frankness. And Volpone, casting aside his sick man's garb, cries :

" My divine Mosca !

Thou hast to-day out gone thyself. . . . Prepare

Me music, dances, banquets, all delights ;

The Turk is not more sensual in his pleasures,

Than will Volpone."<sup>2</sup>

On this invitation, Mosca draws a most voluptuous portrait of Corvino's wife, Celia. Smitten with a sudden desire, Volpone dresses himself as a mountebank, and goes singing under her windows with all the sprightliness of a quack ; for he is naturally a comedian, like a true Italian, of the same family as Scaramouch, as good an actor in the public square as in his house. Having once seen Celia, he resolves to obtain her at any price :

" Mosca, take my keys,

Gold, plate, and jewels, all's at thy devotion ;

Employ them how thou wilt ; nay, coin me too :

So thou, in this, but crown my longings, Mosca."<sup>3</sup>

Mosca then tells Corvino that some quack's oil has cured his master, and that they are looking for a

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 2.



"young woman, lusty and full of juice," to complete the cure :

"Have you no kinswoman ?

Odo—Think, think, think, think, think, think, think, sir.  
One o' the doctors offer'd there his daughter.

*Corvino.* How !

*Mosca.* Yes, signior Lupo, the physician.

*O.* His daughter !

*M.*

And a virgin, sir. . . .

*O.*

Wretch !

Covetous wretch."<sup>1</sup>

Though unreasonably jealous, Corvino is gradually induced to offer his wife. He has given too much already, and would not lose his advantage. He is like a half-ruined gamester, who with a shaking hand throws on the green cloth the remainder of his fortune. He brings the poor sweet woman, weeping and resisting. Excited by his own hidden pangs, he becomes furious :

"Be damn'd !

Heart, I will drag thee hence, home, by the hair ;  
Cry thee a strumpet through the streets ; rip up  
Thy mouth unto thine ears ; and slit thy nose ;  
Like a raw rochet !—Do not tempt me ; come,  
Yield, I am loth—Death ! I will buy some slave  
Whom I will kill, and bind thee to him, alive ;  
And at my window hang you forth, devising  
Some monstrous crime, which I, in capital letters,  
Will eat into thy flesh with aquafortis,  
And burning corsives, on this stubborn breast.  
Now, by the blood thou hast incensed, I'll do it !

*Celia.* Sir, what you please, you may, I am your martyr.

*Corvino.* Be not thus obstinate, I have not deserv'd it :

<sup>1</sup> *Folpone*, ii. 2.

Think who it is intreats you. Prithee, sweet ;—  
 Good faith thou shalt have jewels, gowns, attires,  
 What thou wilt think, and ask. Do but go kiss him,  
 Or touch him, but. For my sake.—At my suit.—  
 This once.—No ! not ! I shall remember this.  
 Will you disgrace me thus ? Do you thirst my undoing !"<sup>1</sup>

Mosca turned a moment before, to Volpone :

" Sir,

Signior Corvino . . . hearing of the consultation had  
 So lately, for your health, is come to offer,  
 Or rather, sir, to prostitute.—

*Corvino.*

Thanks, sweet Mosca.

*Mosca.* Freely, unask'd, or untreated.

*C.*

Well.

*Mosca.* As the true fervent instance of his love,  
 His own most fair and proper wife ; the beauty  
 Only of price in Venice.—

*C.*

"Tis well urg'd."<sup>2</sup>

Where can we see such blows launched and driven hard, full in the face, by the violent hand of satire ? Celia is alone with Volpone, who, throwing off his feigned sickness, comes upon her, "as fresh, as hot, as high, and in as jovial plight," as on the gala-days of the Republic, when he acted the part of the lovely Antinous. In his transport he sings a love song ; his voluptuousness culminates in poetry ; for poetry was then in Italy the blossom of vice. He spreads before her pearls, diamonds, carbuncles. He is in raptures at the sight of the treasures, which he displays and sparkles before her eyes :

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, iii. 5 We pray the reader to pardon us for Ben Jonson's broadness. If I omit it, I cannot depict the sixteenth century. Grant the same indulgence to the historian as to the anatomist.

<sup>2</sup> *Volpone*, iii.

“Take these,  
 And wear, and lose them : yet remains an ear-ring  
 To purchase them again, and this whole state.  
 A gem but worth a private patrimony,  
 Is nothing : we will eat such at a meal,  
 The heads of parrots, tongues of nightingales,  
 The brains of peacocks, and of estriches,  
 Shall be our food. . . .

Conscience? 'Tis the beggar's virtue. . . .  
 Thy baths shall be the juice of July flowers,  
 Spirit of roses, and of violets,  
 The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath  
 Gather'd in bags, and mixt with Oretan wines.  
 Our drink shall be prepared gold and amber ;  
 Which we will take, until my roof whirl round  
 With the vertigo : and my dwarf shall dance,  
 My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic,  
 Whilst we, in changed shapes, act Ovid's tales,  
 Thou, like Europa now, and I like Jove,  
 Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine ;  
 So, of the rest, till we have quite run through,  
 And wearied all the fables of the gods.”<sup>1</sup>

We recognise Venice in this splendour of debauchery—Venice, the throne of Aretinus, the country of Tintoretto and Giorgione. Volpone seizes Celia : “Yield, or I'll force thee !” But suddenly Bonario, disinherited son of Corbaccio, whom Mosca had concealed there with another design, enters violently, delivers her, wounds Mosca, and accuses Volpone before the tribunal, of imposture and rape.

The three rascals who aim at being his heirs, work together to save Volpone. Corbaccio disavows his son,

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, iii. 5.

and accuses him of parricide. Corvino declares his wife an adulteress, the shameless mistress of Bonario. Never on the stage was seen such energy of lying, such open villany. The husband, who knows his wife to be innocent, is the most eager :

" This woman (please your fatherhoods) is a whore,  
Of most hot exercise, more than a partrich,  
Upon record.

1st *Advocate*. No more.

*Corvino*. Neighs like a jennet.

*Notary*. Preserve the honour of the court.

*C*. I shall,

And modesty of your most reverend ears.

And yet I hope that I may say, these eyes

Have seen her glued unto that piece of cedar,

That fine well-timber'd gallant ; and that here

The letters may be read, thorough the horn,

That make the story perfect. . . .

3d *Adv*. His grief hath made him frantic. (*Celia swoons.*)

*C*. Rare ! Prettily feign'd ! again !"<sup>1</sup>

They have Volpone brought in, like a dying man ; manufacture false " testimony," to which Voltore gives weight with his advocate's tongue, with words worth a sequin apiece. They throw Celia and Bonario into prison, and Volpone is saved. This public imposture is for him only another comedy, a pleasant pastime, and a masterpiece.

" *Mosca*. To gull the court.

*Volpone*. And quite divert the torrent

Upon the innocent. . . .

*M*. You are not taken with it enough, methinks.

*V*. O, more than if I had enjoy'd the wench !"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 1.

To conclude, he writes a will in Mosca's favour, has his death reported, hides behind a curtain, and enjoys the looks of the would-be heirs. They had just saved him from being thrown into prison, which makes the fun all the better; the wickedness will be all the greater and more exquisite. "Torture 'em rarely," Volpone says to Mosca. The latter spreads the will on the table, and reads the inventory aloud. "Turkey carpets nine. Two cabinets, one of ebony, the other mother-of-pearl. A perfum'd box, made of an onyx." The heirs are stupefied with disappointment, and Mosca drives them off with insults. He says to Corvino:

"Why should you stay here? with what thought, what promise?  
Hear you; do you not know, I know you an ass,  
And that you would most fain have been a wittol,  
If fortune would have let you? That you are  
A declar'd cuckold, on good terms? This pearl,  
You'll say, was yours? Right: this diamond?  
I'll not deny't, but thank you. Much here else?  
It may be so. Why, think that these good works  
May help to hide your bad. [*Exit Corvino.*] . . .

*Corbaccio.* I am cozen'd, cheated, by a parasite slave;  
Harlot, thou hast gull'd me.

*Mosca.* Yes, sir. Stop your mouth,  
Or I shall draw the only tooth is left.  
Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch,  
With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,  
Have, any time this three years, snufft about,  
With your most grov'ling nose, and would have hir'd  
Me to the pois'ning of my patron, sir?  
Are not you he that have to-day in court  
Profess'd the disinheriting of your son?  
Perjur'd yourself? Go home, and die, and stink."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, v. 1.

Volpone goes out disguised, comes to each of them in turn, and succeeds in wringing their hearts. But Mosca, who has the will, acts with a high hand, and demands of Volpone half his fortune. The dispute between the two rascals discovers their impostures, and the master, the servant, with the three would-be heirs, are sent to the galleys, to prison, to the pillory—as Corvino says, to

“Have mine eyes beat out with stinking fish,  
Bruis’d fruit, and rotten egg. — ’Tis well. I’m glad,  
I shall not see my shame yet.”<sup>1</sup>

No more vengeful comedy has been written, none more persistently athirst to make vice suffer, to unmask, triumph over, and punish it.

Where can be the gaiety of such a theatre? In caricature and farce. There is a rough gaiety, a sort of physical, external laughter which suits this combative, drinking, blustering mood. It is thus that this mood relaxes from war-waging and murderous satire; the pastime is appropriate to the manners of the time, excellent to attract men who look upon hanging as a good joke, and laugh to see the Puritan’s ears cut. Put yourself for an instant in their place, and you will think like them, that *The Silent Woman* is a masterpiece. Morose is an old monomaniac, who has a horror of noise, but loves to speak. He inhabits a street so narrow that a carriage cannot enter it. He drives off with his stick the bear-leaders and sword-players, who venture to pass under his windows. He has sent away his servant whose shoes creaked; and Mute, the new one, wears slippers “soled with wool,” and only speaks in a whisper

<sup>1</sup> *Volpone*, v. 8.

through a tube. Morose ends by forbidding the whisper, and makes him reply by signs. He is also rich, an uncle, and he ill-treats his nephew Sir Dauphine Eugenie, a man of wit, but who lacks money. We anticipate all the tortures which poor Morose is to suffer. Sir Dauphine finds him a supposed silent woman, the beautiful Epiccene. Morose, enchanted by her brief replies and her voice, which he can hardly hear, marries her, to play his nephew a trick. It is his nephew who has played him a trick. As soon as she is married, Epiccene speaks, scolds, argues as loud and as long as a dozen women :—" Why, did you think you had married a statue ? or a motion only ? one of the French puppets, with the eyes turn'd with a wire ? or some innocent out of the hospital, that would stand with her hands thus, and a plaise mouth, and look upon you ?"<sup>1</sup>

She orders the servants to speak louder ; she opens the doors wide to her friends. They arrive in shoals, offering their noisy congratulations to Morose. Five or six women's tongues overwhelm him all at once with compliments, questions, advice, remonstrances. A friend of Sir Dauphine comes with a band of music, who play all together, suddenly, with their whole force. Morose says, " O, a plot, a plot, a plot, a plot, upon me ! This day I shall be their anvil to work on, they will grate me asunder. 'Tis worse than the noise of a saw."<sup>2</sup> A procession of servants is seen coming, with dishes in their hands ; it is the racket of a tavern which Sir Dauphine is bringing to his uncle. The guests clash the glasses, shout, drink healths ; they have with them a drum and trumpets which make great noise. Morose flees to the top of the house, puts

<sup>1</sup> *Epiccene*, iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.

"a whole nest of night-caps" on his head and stuffs up his ears. Captain Otter cries, "Sound, Tritons o' the Thames! *Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero.*" "Villains, murderers, sons of the earth and traitors," cries Morose from above, "what do you there?" The racket increases. Then the captain, somewhat "jovial," maligns his wife, who falls upon him and gives him a good beating. Blows, cries, music, laughter, resound like thunder. It is the poetry of uproar. Here is a subject to shake coarse nerves, and to make the mighty chests of the companions of Drake and Essex shake with uncontrollable laughter. "Rogues, hell-hounds, Stentors! . . . They have rent my roof, walls, and all my windows asunder, with their brazen throats!" Morose casts himself on his tormentors with his long sword, breaks the instruments, drives away the musicians, disperses the guests amidst an inexpressible uproar, gnashing his teeth, looking haggard. Afterwards they pronounce him mad, and discuss his madness before him.<sup>1</sup> The disease in Greek is called *μανία*, in Latin *insania*, *furor*, *vel ecstasis melancholica* that is, *egressio*, when a man *ex melancholico evadit fanaticus*. . . . But he may be but *phreneticus* yet, mistress; and *phrenetis* is only *delirium*, or so." They talk of the books which he must read aloud to cure him. They add by way of consolation, that his wife talks in her sleep, "and snores like a porpoise." "O redeem me, fate; redeem me, fate!" cries the poor man.<sup>2</sup> "For how many causes may a man be divorc'd, nephew?" Sir Dauphine chooses two knaves, and disguises them, one as a priest, the other as a lawyer, who launch at his head Latin terms of civil and canon law, explain to Morose the twelve cases of nullity,

<sup>1</sup> Compare M. de Pourceaugnac in Molière.

<sup>2</sup> *Epigrams*, iv. 1, 2.



jingle in his ears one after another the most barbarous words in their obscure vocabulary, wrangle, and make between them as much noise as a couple of bells in a belfry. Following their advice he declares himself impotent. The wedding-guests propose to toss him in a blanket; others demand an immediate inspection. Fall after fall, shame after shame; nothing serves him; his wife declares that she consents to "take him with all his faults." The lawyer proposes another legal method; Morose shall obtain a divorce by proving that his wife is faithless. Two boasting knights, who are present, declare that they have been her lovers. Morose, in raptures, throws himself at their knees, and embraces them. Epiccene weeps, and Morose seems to be delivered. Suddenly the lawyer decides that the plan is of no avail, the infidelity having been committed before the marriage. "O, this is worst of all worst worsts that hell could have devis'd! marry a whore, and so much noise!" There is Morose then, declared impotent and a deceived husband, at his own request, in the eyes of the whole world, and moreover married for ever. Sir Dauphine comes in like a clever rascal, and as a succouring deity. "Allow me but five hundred during life, uncle," and I free you. Morose signs the deed of gift with alacrity; and his nephew shows him that Epiccene is a boy in disguise.<sup>1</sup> Add to this enchanting farce the funny parts of the two accomplished and gallant knights who, after having boasted of their bravery, receive gratefully, and before the ladies, flips and kicks.<sup>2</sup> Never was coarse physical laughter more adroitly produced.

<sup>1</sup> *Epiccene*, v.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Polichinelle in *Le Malade imaginaire*; Géroste in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*.

In this broad coarse gaiety, this excess of noisy transport, you recognise the stout roysterer, the stalwart drinker who swallowed hogsheads of Canary, and made the windows of the Mermaid shake with his bursts of humour.

## V.

Jonson did not go beyond this; he was not a philosopher like Molière, able to grasp and dramatise the crisis of human life, education, marriage, sickness, the chief characters of his country and century, the courtier, the tradesman, the hypocrite, the man of the world.<sup>1</sup> He remained on a lower level, in the comedy of plot,<sup>2</sup> the painting of the grotesque,<sup>3</sup> the representation of too transient subjects of ridicule,<sup>4</sup> too general vices.<sup>5</sup> If at times, as in the *Alchemist*, he has succeeded by the perfection of plot and the vigour of satire, he has miscarried more frequently by the ponderousness of his work and the lack of comic lightness. The critic in him mars the artist; his literary calculations strip him of spontaneous invention; he is too much of a writer and moralist, not enough of a mimic and an actor. But he is loftier from another side, for he is a poet; almost all writers, prose-authors, preachers even, were so at the time we speak of. Fancy abounded, as well as the perception of colours and forms, the need and wont of enjoying through the imagination and the eyes. Many of Jonson's pieces, the *Staple of News*, *Cynthia's Revels*,

<sup>1</sup> Compare *l'Ecole des Femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Le Bourgeois-gentilhomme*, *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Georges Dandin*.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *les Fourberies de Scapin*.

<sup>3</sup> Compare *les Fâcheux*.

<sup>4</sup> Compare *les Précieuses Ridicules*.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the plays of Destouches.

are fanciful and allegorical comedies like those of Aristophanes. He there dallies with the real, and beyond the real, with characters who are but theatrical masks, abstractions personified, buffooneries, decorations, dances, music, pretty laughing whims of a picturesque and sentimental imagination. Thus, in *Cynthia's Revels*, three children come on "pleading possession of the cloke" of black velvet, which an actor usually wore when he spoke the prologue. They draw lots for it; one of the losers, in revenge, tells the audience beforehand the incidents of the piece. The others interrupt him at every sentence, put their hands on his mouth, and taking the cloak one after the other, begin to criticise the spectators and authors. This child's play, these gestures and loud voices, this little amusing dispute, divert the public from their serious thoughts, and prepare them for the oddities which they are to look upon.

We are in Greece, in the valley of Gargaphie, where Diana<sup>1</sup> has proclaimed "a solemn revels." Mercury and Cupid have come down, and begin by quarrelling; the latter says: "My light feather-heel'd coz, what are you any more than my uncle Jove's pander? a lacquey that runs on errands for him, and can whisper a light message to a loose wench with some round volubility? . . . One that sweeps the gods' drinking-room every morning, and sets the cushions in order again, which they threw one at another's head over night?"<sup>2</sup>

They are good-tempered gods. Echo, awoke by Mercury weeps for the "too beauteous boy Narcissus":

"That trophy of self-love, and spoil of nature,  
Who, now transformed into this drooping flower,

<sup>1</sup> By Diana, Queen Elizabeth is meant.

<sup>2</sup> *Cynthia's Revels*, i. 1.

Hangs the repentant head, back from the stream. . . .  
 Witness thy youth's dear sweets, here spent untasted,  
 Like a fair taper, with his own flame wasted ! . . .  
 And with thy water let this curse remain,  
 As an inseparate plague, that who but taste  
 A drop thereof, may, with the instant touch,  
 Grow doatingly enamour'd on themselves." <sup>1</sup>

The courtiers and ladies drink thereof, and behold, a sort of a review of the follies of the time, arranged, as in Aristophanes, in an improbable farce, a brilliant show. A silly spendthrift, Asotus, wishes to become a man of the court and of fashionable manners ; he takes for his master Amorphus, a learned traveller, expert in galantry, who, to believe himself, is

" An essence so sublimated and refined by travel . . . able . . . to speak the mere extraction of language ; one that . . . was your first that ever enrich'd his country with the true laws of the duello ; whose optics have drunk the spirit of beauty in some eight-score and eighteen princes' courts, where I have resided, and been there fortunate in the amours of three hundred forty and five ladies, all nobly if not princely descended, . . . in all so happy, as even admiration herself doth seem to fasten her kisses upon me." <sup>2</sup>

Asotus learns at this good school the language of the court, fortifies himself like other people with quibbles, learned oaths, and metaphors ; he fires off in succession supersubtle tirades, and duly imitates the grimaces and tortuous style of his masters. Then, when he has drunk the water of the fountain, becoming suddenly pert and rash, he proposes to all comers a tournament of "court compliment." This odd tournament

<sup>1</sup> *Cynthia's Revels*, i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

is held before the ladies ; it comprises four jousts, and at each the trumpets sound. The combatants perform in succession "the BARE ACCOST;" "the BETTER REGARD;" "the SOLEMN ADDRESS;" and "the PERFECT CLOSE."<sup>1</sup> In this grave buffoonery the courtiers are beaten. The severe Crites, the moralist of the play, copies their language, and pierces them with their own weapons. Already, with grand declamation, he had rebuked them thus :

" O vanity,  
How are thy painted beauties doated on,  
By light, and empty idiots ! how pursu'd  
With open and extended appetite !  
How they do sweat, and run themselves from breath,  
Rais'd on their toes, to catch thy airy forms,  
Still turning giddy, till they reel like drunkards,  
That buy the merry madness of one hour,  
With the long irksomeness of following time ! " <sup>2</sup>

To complete the overthrow of the vices, appear two symbolical masques, representing the contrary virtues. They pass gravely before the spectators, in splendid array, and the noble verses exchanged by the goddess and her companions raise the mind to the lofty regions of serene morality, whither the poet desires to carry us :

" Queen, and huntress, chaste and fair,  
Now the sun is laid to sleep,  
Seated in thy silver chair,  
State in wonted manner keep. . .  
Lay thy bow of pearl apart,  
And thy crystal shining quiver ;  
Give unto the flying hart  
Space to breathe, how short soever." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cynthia's Revels*, v. 2.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 1.<sup>3</sup> *Cynthia's Revels*, v. 8.

In the end, bidding the dancers to unmask, Cynthia shows that the vices have disguised themselves as virtues. She condemns them to make fit reparation, and to bathe themselves in Helicon. Two by two they go off singing a palinode, whilst the chorus sings the supplication "Good Mercury defend us."<sup>1</sup> Is it an opera or a comedy? It is a lyrical comedy; and if we do not discover in it the airy lightness of Aristophanes, at least we encounter, as in the *Birds* and the *Frogs*, the contrasts and medleys of poetic invention, which, through caricature and ode, the real and the impossible, the present and the past, sent forth to the four quarters of the globe, simultaneously unites all kinds of incompatibilities, and culls all flowers.

Jonson went further than this, and entered the domain of pure poetry. He wrote delicate, voluptuous, charming love poems, worthy of the ancient idyllic muse.<sup>2</sup> Above all, he was the great, the inexhaustible inventor of Masques, a kind of masquerades, ballets, poetic choruses, in which all the magnificence and the imagination of the English Renaissance is displayed. The Greek gods, and all the ancient Olympus, the allegorical personages whom the artists of the time delineate in their pictures; the antique heroes of popular legends; all worlds, the actual, the abstract, the divine, the human, the ancient, the modern, are searched by his hands, brought on the stage to furnish costumes, harmonious groups, emblems, songs, whatever can excite, intoxicate the artistic sense. The *élite*, moreover, of the kingdom is there on the stage. They are not mountebanks moving about in borrowed clothes, clumsily

<sup>1</sup> *Cynthia's Revels*, last scene.

<sup>2</sup> *Celebration of Charis—Miscellaneous Poems.*

worn, for which they are still in debt to the tailor; they are ladies of the court, great lords, the queen, in all the splendour of their rank and pride, with real diamonds, bent on displaying their riches, so that the whole splendour of the national life is concentrated in the opera which they enact, like jewels in a casket. What dresses! what profusion of splendours! what medley of strange characters, gipsies, witches, gods, heroes, pontiffs, gnomes, fantastic beings! How many metamorphoses, jousts, dances, marriage songs! What variety of scenery, architecture, floating isles, triumphal arches, symbolic spheres! Gold glitters; jewels flash; purple absorbs the lustre-lights in its costly folds; streams of light shine upon the crumpled silks; diamond necklaces, darting flame, clasp the bare bosoms of the ladies; strings of pearls are displayed, loop after loop, upon the silver-sown brocaded dresses; gold embroidery, weaving whimsical arabesques, depicts upon their dresses flowers, fruits, and figures, setting picture within picture. The steps of the throne bear groups of Cupids, each with a torch in his hand.<sup>1</sup> On either side the fountains cast up plumes of pearls; musicians, in purple and scarlet, laurel-crowned, make harmony in the bowers. The trains of masques cross, commingling their groups; "the one half in orange-tawny and silver, the other in sea-green and silver. The bodies and short skirts (were of) white and gold to both."

Such pageants Jonson wrote year after year, almost to the end of his life, true feasts for the eyes, like the processions of Titian. Even when he grew to be old, his imagination, like that of Titian, remained abundant and fresh. Though forsaken, lying gasping on his bed, feel-

<sup>1</sup> *Masque of Beauty.*

ing the approach of death, in his supreme bitterness he did not lose his faculties, but wrote *The Sad Shepherd*, the most graceful and pastoral of his pieces. Consider that this beautiful dream arose in a sick-chamber, amidst medicine bottles, physic, doctors, with a nurse at his side, amidst the anxieties of poverty and the choking-fits of a dropsy! He is transported to a green forest, in the days of Robin Hood, amidst the gay chase and the great barking greyhounds. There are the malicious fairies, who like Oberon and Titania, lead men to flounder in mishaps. There are open-souled lovers, who like Daphne and Chloe, taste with awe the painful sweetness of the first kiss. There lived Earine, whom the stream has "suck'd in," whom her lover, in his madness, will not cease to lament:

" Earine,

Who had her very being, and her name  
With the first knots or buddings of the spring,  
Born with the primrose or the violet,  
Or earliest roses blown: when Cupid smil'd,  
And Venus led the graces out to dance,  
And all the flowers and sweets in nature's lap  
Leap'd out, and made their solemn conjuration  
To last but while she liv'd!" . . . <sup>1</sup>

"But she, as chaste as was her name, Earine,  
Died undeflower'd: and now her sweet soul hovers  
Here in the air above us." <sup>2</sup>

Above the poor old paralytic artist, poetry still hovers like a haze of light. Yes, he had cumbered himself with science, clogged himself with theories, constituted himself theatrical critic and social censor,

<sup>1</sup> *The Sad Shepherd*, i. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.



filled his soul with unrelenting indignation, fostered a combative and morose disposition; but divine dreams never left him. He is the brother of Shakspeare.

## VI.

So now at last we are in the presence of one, whom we perceived before us through all the vistas of the Renaissance, like some vast oak to which all the forest ways converge. I will treat of Shakspeare by himself. In order to take him in completely, we must have a wide and open space. And yet how shall we comprehend him? how lay bare his inner constitution? Lofty words, eulogies, are all used in vain; he needs no praise, but comprehension merely; and he can only be comprehended by the aid of science. As the complicated revolutions of the heavenly bodies become intelligible only by use of a superior calculus, as the delicate transformations of vegetation and life need for their explanation the intervention of the most difficult chemical formulas, so the great works of art can be interpreted only by the most advanced psychological systems; and we need the loftiest of all these to attain to Shakspeare's level—to the level of his age and his work, of his genius and of his art.

After all practical experience and accumulated observations of the soul, we find as the result that wisdom and knowledge are in man only effects and fortuities. Man has no permanent and distinct force to secure truth to his intelligence, and common sense to his conduct. On the contrary, he is naturally unreasonable and deceived. The parts of his inner mechanism are like the wheels of clock-work, which go of themselves,

blindly, carried away by impulse and weight, and which yet sometimes, by virtue of a certain unison, end by indicating the hour. This final intelligent motion is not natural, but fortuitous ; not spontaneous, but forced ; not innate, but acquired. The clock did not always go regularly ; on the contrary, it had to be regulated little by little, with much difficulty. Its regularity is not ensured ; it may go wrong at any time. Its regularity is not complete ; it only approximately marks the time. The mechanical force of each piece is always ready to drag all the rest from their proper action, and to disarrange the whole agreement. So ideas, once in the mind, pull each their own way blindly and separately, and their imperfect agreement threatens confusion every moment. Strictly speaking, man is mad, as the body is ill, by nature ; reason and health come to us as a momentary success, a lucky accident.<sup>1</sup> If we forget this, it is because we are now regulated, dulled, deadened, and because our internal motion has become gradually, by friction and reparation, half harmonised with the motion of things. But this is only a semblance ; and the dangerous primitive forces remain untamed and independent under the order which seems to restrain them. Let a great danger arise, a revolution take place, they will break out and explode, almost as terribly as in earlier times. For an idea is not a mere inner mark, employed to designate one aspect of things, inert, always ready to fall into order with other similar ones, so as to make an exact whole. However it may be reduced and disciplined, it still retains a sensible tinge which shows

<sup>1</sup> This idea may be expanded psychologically : external perception, memory, are real hallucinations, etc. This is the analytical aspect : under another aspect reason and health are the natural goals.

its likeness to an hallucination ; a degree of individual persistence which shows its likeness to a monomania ; a network of singular affinities which shows its likeness to the ravings of delirium. Being such, it is beyond question the rudiment of a nightmare, a habit, an absurdity. Let it become once developed in its entirety, as its tendency leads it,<sup>1</sup> and you will find that it is essentially an active and complete image, a vision drawing along with it a train of dreams and sensations, which increases of itself, suddenly, by a sort of rank and absorbing growth, and which ends by possessing, shaking, exhausting the whole man. After this, another, perhaps entirely opposite, and so on successively : there is nothing else in man, no free and distinct power ; he is in himself but the process of these headlong impulses and swarming imaginations : civilisation has mutilated, attenuated, but not destroyed them ; shocks, collisions, transports, sometimes at long intervals a sort of transient partial equilibrium : this is his real life, the life of a lunatic, who now and then simulates reason, but who is in reality "such stuff as dreams are made on ;"<sup>2</sup> and this is man, as Shakspeare has conceived him. No writer, not even Molière, has penetrated so far beneath the semblance of common sense and logic in which the human machine is enclosed, in order to disentangle the brute powers which constitute its substance and its mainspring.

How did Shakspeare succeed ? and by what extraordinary instinct did he divine the remote conclusions, the deepest insights of physiology and psychology ? He had a complete imagination ; his whole genius lies

<sup>1</sup> See Spinoza and Dugald Stewart : Conception in its natural state is belief.

<sup>2</sup> *Tempest*, iv. 1.

in that complete imagination. These words seem commonplace and void of meaning. Let us examine them closer, to understand what they contain. When we think a thing, we, ordinary men, we only think a part of it; we see one side, some isolated mark, sometimes two or three marks together; for what is beyond, our sight fails us; the infinite network of its infinitely-complicated and multiplied properties escapes us; we feel vaguely that there is something beyond our shallow ken, and this vague suspicion is the only part of our idea which at all reveals to us the great beyond. We are like tyro-naturalists, quiet people of limited understanding, who, wishing to represent an animal, recall its name and ticket in the museum, with some indistinct image of its hide and figure; but their mind stops there. If it so happens that they wish to complete their knowledge, they lead their memory, by regular classifications, over the principal characters of the animal, and slowly, discursively, piecemeal, bring at last the bare anatomy before their eyes. To this their idea is reduced, even when perfected; to this also most frequently is our conception reduced, even when elaborated. What a distance there is between this conception and the object, how imperfectly and meanly the one represents the other, to what extent this mutilates that; how the consecutive idea, disjointed in little, regularly arranged and inert fragments, resembles but slightly the organised, living thing, created simultaneously, ever in action, and ever transformed, words cannot explain. Picture to yourself, instead of this poor dry idea, propped up by a miserable mechanical linkwork of thought, the complete idea, that is, an inner representation, so abundant and full, that it exhausts all the properties and relations of the object, all

its inward and outward aspects ; that it exhausts them instantaneously ; that it conceives of the entire animal, its colour, the play of the light upon its skin, its form, the quivering of its outstretched limbs, the flash of its eyes, and at the same time its passion of the moment, its excitement, its dash ; and beyond this its instincts, their composition, their causes, their history ; so that the hundred thousand characteristics which make up its condition and its nature find their analogues in the imagination which concentrates and reflects them : there you have the artist's conception, the poet's—Shakspeare's ; so superior to that of the logician, of the mere savant or man of the world, the only one capable of penetrating to the very essence of existences, of extricating the inner from beneath the outer man, of feeling through sympathy, and imitating without effort, the irregular oscillation of human imaginations and impressions, of reproducing life with its infinite fluctuations, its apparent contradictions, its concealed logic ; in short, to create as nature creates. This is what is done by the other artists of this age ; they have the same kind of mind, and the same idea of life : you will find in Shakspeare only the same faculties, with a still stronger impulse ; the same idea, with a still more prominent relief.

## CHAPTER IV.

*Shakspeare.*

I AM about to describe an extraordinary species of mind, perplexing to all the French modes of analysis and reasoning, all-powerful, excessive, master of the sublime as well as of the base ; the most creative mind that ever engaged in the exact copy of the details of actual existence, in the dazzling caprice of fancy, in the profound complications of superhuman passions ; a nature poetical, immoral, inspired, superior to reason by the sudden revelations of its seer's madness ; so extreme in joy and grief, so abrupt of gait, so agitated and impetuous in its transports, that this great age alone could have cradled such a child.

## I.

Of Shakspeare all came from within—I mean from his soul and his genius ; circumstances and the externals contributed but slightly to his development.<sup>1</sup> He was intimately bound up with his age ; that is, he knew by experience the manners of country, court, and town ; he had visited the heights, depths, the middle ranks of mankind ; nothing more. In all other respects, his life was commonplace ; its irregularities, troubles, passions, suc-

<sup>1</sup> Halliwell's *Life of Shakspeare*.

cesses, were, on the whole, such as we meet with everywhere else.<sup>1</sup> His father, a glover and wool-stapler, in very easy circumstances, having married a sort of country heiress, had become high-bailiff and chief alderman in his little town; but when Shakspeare was nearly fourteen he was on the verge of ruin, mortgaging his wife's property, obliged to resign his municipal offices, and to remove his son from school to assist him in his business. The young fellow applied himself to it as well as he could, not without some scrapes and frolics: if we are to believe tradition, he was one of the thirsty souls of the place, with a mind to support the reputation of his little town in its drinking powers. Once, they say, having been beaten at Bideford in one of these ale-bouts, he returned staggering from the fight, or rather could not return, and passed the night with his comrades under an apple-tree by the roadside. Without doubt he had already begun to write verses, to rove about like a genuine poet, taking part in the noisy rustic feasts, the gay allegorical pastorals, the rich and bold outbreak of pagan and poetical life, as it was then to be found in an English village. At all events, he was not a pattern of propriety, and his passions were as precocious as they were imprudent. While not yet nineteen years old, he married the daughter of a substantial yeoman, about eight years older than himself—and not too soon, as she was about to become a mother.<sup>2</sup> Other of his outbreaks were no more fortunate. It

<sup>1</sup> Born 1564, died 1616. He adapted plays as early as 1591. The first play entirely from his pen appeared in 1593.—PAYNE COLLIER.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Halliwell and other commentators try to prove that at this time the preliminary trothplight was regarded as the real marriage; that this trothplight had taken place, and that there was therefore no irregularity in Shakspeare's conduct.

seems that he was fond of poaching, after the manner of the time, being "much given to all unluckinesses in stealing venison and rabbits," says the Rev. Richard Davies;<sup>1</sup> "particularly from Sir Thomas Lucy, who had him oft whipt and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly the country; . . . but his revenge was so great, that he is his Justice Clodpate." Moreover, about this time Shakspeare's father was in prison, his affairs were not prosperous, and he himself had three children, following one close upon the other; he must live, and life was hardly possible for him in his native town. He went to London, and took to the stage: took the lowest parts, was a "servant" in the theatre, that is, an apprentice, or perhaps a supernumerary. They even said that he had begun still lower, and that to earn his bread he had held gentlemen's horses at the door of the theatre.<sup>2</sup> At all events he tasted misery, and felt, not in imagination, but in fact, the sharp thorn of care, humiliation, disgust, forced labour, public discredit, the power of the people. He was a comedian, one of "His Majesty's poor players,"<sup>3</sup> —a sad trade, degraded in all ages by the contrasts and the falsehoods which it allows: still more degraded then by the brutalities of the crowd, who not seldom would stone the actors, and by the severities of the magistrates, who would sometimes condemn them to lose their ears. He felt it, and spoke of it with bitterness:

<sup>1</sup> Halliwell, 123.

<sup>2</sup> All these anecdotes are traditions, and consequently more or less doubtful; but the other facts are authentic.

<sup>3</sup> Terms of an extant document. He is named along with Burbadge and Greene.



"Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear."<sup>1</sup>

And again :

"When in disgrace with fortune<sup>2</sup> and men's eyes,  
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed. . . .  
With what I most enjoy contented least ;  
Yet in those thoughts myself almost despising."<sup>3</sup>

We shall find further on the traces of this long-enduring disgust, in his melancholy characters, as where he says :

"For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin ?"<sup>4</sup>

But the worst of this undervalued position is, that it eats into the soul. In the company of actors we become actors : it is vain to wish to keep clean, if you live in a dirty place ; it cannot be. No matter if a man braces himself ; necessity drives him into a corner and sullies

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet* 110.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sonnets* 91 and 111 ; also *Hamlet*, iii. 2. Many of Hamlet's words would come better from the mouth of an actor than a prince. See also the 66th *Sonnet*, "Tired with all these."

<sup>3</sup> *Sonnet* 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Hamlet*, iii. 1.

him. The machinery of the decorations, the tawdriness and medley of the costumes, the smell of the tallow and the candles, in contrast with the parade of refinement and loftiness, all the cheats and sordidness of the representation, the bitter alternative of hissing or applause, the keeping of the highest and lowest company, the habit of sporting with human passions, easily unhinge the soul, drive it down the slope of excess, tempt it to loose manners, green-room adventures, the loves of strolling actresses. Shakspeare escaped them no more than Molière, and grieved for it, like Molière:

"O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds."<sup>1</sup>

They used to relate in London, how his comrade Burbadge, who played Richard III., having a rendezvous with the wife of a citizen, Shakspeare went before, was well received, and was pleasantly occupied, when Burbadge arrived, to whom he sent the message, that William the Conqueror came before Richard III.<sup>2</sup> We may take this as an example of the tricks and somewhat coarse intrigues which are planned, and follow in quick succession, on this stage. Outside the theatre he lived with fashionable young nobles, Pembroke, Montgomery, Southampton,<sup>3</sup> and others, whose hot and licentious youth gratified his imagination and senses by the example of Italian pleasures and elegancies.

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet* 111.

<sup>2</sup> Anecdote written in 1602 on the authority of Tooley the actor.

<sup>3</sup> The Earl of Southampton was nineteen years old when Shakspeare dedicated his *Adonis* to him.

Add to this the rapture and transport of poetical nature, and this kind of afflux, this boiling over of all the powers and desires which takes place in brains of this kind, when the world for the first time opens before them, and you will understand the *Venus and Adonis*, "the first heir of his invention." In fact, it is a first cry, a cry in which the whole man is displayed. Never was seen a heart so quivering to the touch of beauty, of beauty of every kind, so delighted with the freshness and splendour of things, so eager and so excited in adoration and enjoyment, so violently and entirely carried to the very essence of voluptuousness. His Venus is unique; no painting of Titian's has a more brilliant and delicious colouring;<sup>1</sup> no strumpet-goddess of Tintoretto or Giorgione is more soft and beautiful:

"With blindfold fury she begins to forage,  
Her face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil. . . .

And glutton-like she feeds, yet never filleth;  
Her lips are conquerors, his lips obey,  
Paying what ransom the insulter willeth;  
Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high,  
That she will draw his lips' rich treasure dry."<sup>2</sup>

"Even as an empty eagle, sharp by fast,  
Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh and bone,  
Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste,  
Till either gorge be stuff'd or prey be gone;  
Even so she kiss'd his brow, his cheek, his chin,  
And where she ends she doth anew begin."<sup>3</sup>

All is taken by storm, the senses first, the eyes dazzled  
by carnal beauty, but the heart also from whence the

<sup>1</sup> See Titian's picture, *Loves of the Gods*, at Blenheim.

<sup>2</sup> *Venus and Adonis*, l. 548-553.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* l. 55-60.

poetry overflows: the fulness of youth inundates even inanimate things; the country looks charming amidst the rays of the rising sun, the air, saturated with brightness, makes a gala-day;

“Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,  
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,  
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast  
The sun ariseth in his majesty;  
Who doth the world so gloriously behold  
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.”<sup>1</sup>

An admirable debauch of imagination and rapture, yet disquieting; for such a mood will carry one a long way.<sup>2</sup> No fair and frail dame in London was without *Adonis* on her table.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Shakspeare perceived that he had transcended the bounds, for the tone of his next poem, the *Rape of Lucrece*, is quite different; but as he had already a mind liberal enough to embrace at the same time, as he did afterwards in his dramas, the two extremes of things, he continued none the less to follow his bent. The “sweet abandonment of love” was the great occupation of his life; he was tender-hearted, and he was a poet: nothing more is required to be smitten, deceived, to suffer, to traverse without pause the circle of illusions and troubles, which whirls and whirls round, and never ends.

He had many loves of this kind, amongst others one for a sort of Marion Delorme,<sup>4</sup> a miserable deluding de-

<sup>1</sup> *Venus and Adonis*, l. 853-858.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the first pieces of Alfred de Musset, *Contes d'Italie et d'Espagne*.

<sup>3</sup> Crawley, quoted by Ph. Chaslen, *Etudes sur Shakspeare*.

<sup>4</sup> A famed French courtesan (1613-1650), the heroine of a drama of that name, by Victor Hugo, having for its subject-matter: “Love purifies everything.”—T<sub>h</sub>.

spotic passion, of which he felt the burden and the shame, but from which nevertheless he could not and would not free himself. Nothing can be sadder than his confessions, or mark better the madness of love, and the sentiment of human weakness :

“ When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her, though I know she lies.”<sup>1</sup>

So spoke Alceste of Célimène ;<sup>2</sup> but what a soiled Célimène is the creature before whom Shakspeare kneels, with as much of scorn as of desire !

“ Those lips of thine,  
That have profaned their scarlet ornaments  
And seal'd false bonds of love as oft as mine,  
Robb'd others' beds' revenues of their rents.  
Be it lawful I love thee, as thou lov'st those  
Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune thee.”<sup>3</sup>

This is plain-speaking and deep shamelessness of soul, such as we find only in the stews ; and these are the intoxications, the excesses, the delirium into which the most refined artists fall, when they resign their own noble hand to these soft, voluptuous, and clinging ones. They are higher than princes, and they descend to the lowest depths of sensual passion. Good and evil then lose their names ; all things are inverted :

“ How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame  
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,  
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name !  
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose !

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet* 138.

<sup>2</sup> Two characters in Molière's *Misanthrope*. The scene referred to is Act v. sc. 7.—Tr.

<sup>3</sup> *Sonnet* 142.

That tongue that tells the story of thy days,  
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,  
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise ;  
Naming thy name blesses an ill report."<sup>1</sup>

What are proofs, the will, reason, honour itself, when the passion is so absorbing? What can be said further to a man who answers, "I know all that you are going to say, and what does it all amount to?" Great loves are inundations, which drown all repugnance and all delicacy of soul, all preconceived opinions and all received principles. Thenceforth the heart is dead to all ordinary pleasures: it can only feel and breathe on one side. Shakspeare envies the keys of the instrument over which his mistress' fingers run. If he looks at flowers, it is she whom he pictures beyond them; and the extravagant splendours of dazzling poetry spring up in him repeatedly, as soon as he thinks of those glowing black eyes:

"From you have I been absent in the spring,  
When proud-pied April dress'd in all his trim,  
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,  
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him."<sup>2</sup>

He saw none of it:

"Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,  
Nor praise the deep vermillion in the rose."<sup>3</sup>

All this sweetness of spring was but her perfume and her shade:

"The forward violet thus I did chide:  
'Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,  
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride,

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet 95.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sonnet 98.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells  
 In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.<sup>1</sup>  
 The lily I condemned for thy hand,  
 And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair :  
 The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,  
 One blushing shame, another white despair :  
 A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both  
 And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath ; . . .  
 More flowers I noted, yet I none could see  
 But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee."<sup>1</sup>

Passionate archness, delicious affectations, worthy of Heine and the contemporaries of Dante, which tell us of long rapturous dreams concentrated on one object. Under a sway so imperious and sustained, what sentiment could maintain its ground? That of family? He was married and had children,—a family which he went to see "once a year;" and it was probably on his return from one of these journeys that he used the words above quoted. Conscience? "Love is too young to know what conscience is." Jealousy and anger?

"For, thou betraying me, I do betray  
 My nobler part to my gross body's treason."<sup>2</sup>

Repulses?

"He is contented thy poor drudge to be  
 To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side."<sup>3</sup>

He is no longer young; she loves another, a handsome, young, light-haired fellow, his own dearest friend, whom he has presented to her, and whom she wishes to seduce:

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet 99.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sonnet 151.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"Two loves I have of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still :  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worse spirit a woman colour'd ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side." <sup>1</sup>

And when she has succeeded in this,<sup>2</sup> he dares not confess it to himself, but suffers all, like Molière. What wretchedness is there in these trifles of every-day life! How man's thoughts instinctively place by Shakspeare's side the great unhappy French poet (Molière), also a philosopher by nature, but more of a professional laughier, a mocker of old men in love, a bitter railer at deceived husbands, who, after having played in one of his most approved comedies, said aloud to a friend, "My dear fellow, I am in despair; my wife does not love me!" Neither glory, nor work, nor invention satisfy these vehement souls: love alone can gratify them, because, with their senses and heart, it contents also their brain; and all the powers of man, imagination like the rest, find in it their concentration and their employment. "Love is my sin," he said, as did Musset and Heine; and in the *Sonnets* we find traces of yet other passions, equally abandoned; one in particular, seemingly for a great lady. The first half of his dramas, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, preserve the warm imprint more completely; and we have only to

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet* 144; also the *Passionate Pilgrim*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> This new interpretation of the *Sonnets* is due to the ingenious and learned conjectures of M. Ph. Charles.—For a short history of these *Sonnets*, see Dyce's *Shakspeare*, i. pp. 96–102. This learned editor says: "I contend that allusions scattered through the whole series are not to be hastily referred to the personal circumstances of Shakspeare."—*Tr.*



consider his latest women's character,<sup>1</sup> to see with what exquisite tenderness, what full adoration, he loved them to the end.

In this is all his genius ; his was one of those delicate souls which, like a perfect instrument of music, vibrate of themselves at the slightest touch. This fine sensibility was the first thing observed in him. "My darling Shakspeare," "Sweet Swan of Avon : " these words of Ben Johnson only confirm what his contemporaries reiterate. He was affectionate and kind, "civil in demeanour, and excellent in the qualitie he professes ;"<sup>2</sup> if he had the impulse, he had also the effusion of true artists ; he was loved, men were delighted in his company ; nothing is more sweet or winning than this charm, this half-feminine abandonment in a man. His wit in conversation was ready, ingenious, nimble ; his gaiety brilliant ; his imagination fluent, and so copious, that, as his friends tell us, he never erased

<sup>1</sup> Miranda, Desdemona, Viola. The following are the first words of the Duke in *Twelfth Night* :—

"If music be the food of love, play on ;  
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.  
That strain again ! it had a dying fall :  
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour ! Enough ; no more :  
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.  
O spirit of love ! how quick and fresh art thou,  
That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,  
Of what validity and pitch soever,  
But falls into abatement and low price,  
Even in a minute : so full of shapes is fancy  
That it alone is high-fantastical."

<sup>2</sup> H. Chettle, in repudiating Greene's sarcasm, attributed to him.

what he had written ;—at least when he wrote out a scene for the second time, it was the idea which he would change, not the words, by an after-glow of poetic thought, not with a painful tinkering of the verse. All these characteristics are combined into a single one : he had a sympathetic genius ; I mean that naturally he knew how to forget himself and become transfused into all the objects which he conceived. Look around you at the great artists of your time, try to approach them, to become acquainted with them, to see them as they think, and you will observe the full force of this word. By an extraordinary instinct, they put themselves at once in a position of existences ; men, animals, flowers, plants, landscapes, whatever the objects are, living or not, they feel by intuition the forces and tendencies which produce the visible external ; and their soul, infinitely complex, becomes by its ceaseless metamorphoses, a sort of abstract of the universe. This is why they seem to live more than other men ; they have no need to be taught, they divine. I have seen such a man, apropos of a piece of armour, a costume, a collection of furniture, enter into the middle-age more fully than three savants together. They reconstruct, as they build, naturally, surely, by an inspiration which is a winged chain of reasoning. Shakspeare had only an imperfect education, "small Latin and less Greek," barely French and Italian,<sup>1</sup> nothing else ; he had not travelled, he had only read the current literature of his day, he had picked up a few law words in the court of his little town : reckon up, if you can, all that he knew of man and of history. These men see more objects

<sup>1</sup> Dyce, *Shakspeare*, i. 27 : "Of French and Italian, I apprehend, he knew but little."—Tr.

at a time ; they grasp them more closely than other men, more quickly and thoroughly ; their mind is full, and runs over. They do not rest in simple reasoning ; at every idea their whole being, reflections, images, emotions, are set aquiver. See them at it ; they gesticulate, mimic their thought, brim over with comparisons ; even in their talk they are imaginative and original, with familiarity and boldness of speech, sometimes happily, always irregularly, according to the whims and starts of the adventurous improvisation. The animation, the brilliancy of their language is marvellous ; so are their fits, the wide leaps with which they couple widely-removed ideas, annihilating distance, passing from pathos to humour, from vehemence to gentleness. This extraordinary rapture is the last thing to quit them. If perchance ideas fail, or if their melancholy is too violent, they still speak and produce, even if it be nonsense : they become clowns, though at their own expense, and to their own hurt. I know one of these men who will talk nonsense when he thinks he is dying, or has a mind to kill himself ; the inner wheel continues to turn, even upon nothing, that wheel which man must needs see ever turning, even though it tear him as it turns ; his buffoonery is an outlet : you will find him, this inextinguishable urchin, this ironical puppet, at Ophelia's tomb, at Cleopatra's death-bed, at Juliet's funeral. High or low, these men must always be at some extreme. They feel their good and their ill too deeply ; they expatiate too abundantly on each condition of their soul, by a sort of involuntary novel. After the traducings and the disgusts by which they debase themselves beyond measure, they rise and become exalted in a marvellous fashion, even

trembling with pride and joy. "Haply," says Shakespeare, after one of these dull moods :

"Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate."<sup>1</sup>

Then all fades away, as in a furnace where a stronger flare than usual has left no substance fuel behind it.

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest."<sup>2</sup> . . .

"No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
Give warning to the world that I am fled  
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:  
Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,  
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot  
If thinking on me then should make you woe."<sup>3</sup>

These sudden alternatives of joy and sadness, divine transports and grand melancholies, exquisite tenderness and womanly depressions, depict the poet, extreme in emotions, ceaselessly troubled with grief or merriment, feeling the slightest shock, more strong, more dainty in enjoyment and suffering than other men, capable of more intense and sweeter dreams, within whom is

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet 29.

<sup>2</sup> Sonnet 73.

<sup>3</sup> Sonnet 71.

stirred an imaginary world of graceful or terrible beings, all impassioned like their author.

Such as I have described him, however, he found his resting-place. Early, at least what regards outward appearances, he settled down to an orderly, sensible, almost humdrum existence, engaged in business, provident of the future. He remained on the stage for at least seventeen years, though taking secondary parts;<sup>1</sup> he sets his wits at the same time to the touching up of plays with so much activity, that Greene called him "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers; . . . an absolute *Johannes factotum*, in his owne conceyt the onely shake-scene in a countrey."<sup>2</sup> At the age of thirty-three he had amassed money enough to buy at Stratford a house with two barns and two gardens, and he went on steadier and steadier in the same course. A man attains only to easy circumstances by his own labour; if he gains wealth, it is by making others labour for him. This is why, to the trades of actor and author, Shakspeare added those of manager and director of a theatre. He acquired a share in the Blackfriars and Globe theatres, farmed tithes, bought large pieces of land, more houses, gave a dowry to his daughter Susanna, and finally retired to his native town on his property, in his own house, like a good landlord, an honest citizen, who manages his fortune fitly, and takes his share of municipal work. He had an income of two or three hundred pounds, which would be equivalent to about eight or twelve hundred at the present time, and according to tradition, lived cheerfully and on good terms with his neighbours; at all events, it

<sup>1</sup> The part in which he excelled was that of the ghost in *Hamlet*.

<sup>2</sup> Greene's *A Groatworth of Wit*, etc.

does not seem that he thought much about his literary glory, for he did not even take the trouble to collect and publish his works. One of his daughters married a physician, the other a wine merchant; the last did not even know how to sign her name. He lent money, and cut a good figure in this little world. Strange close; one which at first sight resembles more that of a shopkeeper than of a poet. Must we attribute it to that English instinct which places happiness in the life of a country gentleman and a landlord with a good rent-roll, well connected, surrounded by comforts, who quietly enjoys his undoubted respectability,<sup>1</sup> his domestic authority, and his county standing? Or rather, was Shakspeare, like Voltaire, a common-sense man, though of an imaginative brain, keeping a sound judgment under the sparkling of his genius, prudent from scepticism, saving through a desire for independence, and capable, after going the round of human ideas, of deciding with *Candide*,<sup>2</sup> that the best thing one can do in this world is "to cultivate one's garden?" I had rather think, as his full and solid head suggests,<sup>3</sup> that by the mere force of his overflowing imagination he escaped, like Goethe, the perils of an overflowing imagination; that in depicting passion, he succeeded, like Goethe, in deadening passion; that the fire did not break out in his conduct, because it found issue in his poetry; that his theatre kept pure his life; and that, having passed, by sympathy, through every kind of folly and wretchedness that is incident to human ex-

<sup>1</sup> "He was a respectable man." "A good word; what does it mean?" "He kept a gig."—(From Thurtell's trial for the murder of Weare.)

<sup>2</sup> The model of an optimist, the hero of one of Voltaire's tales.—*Tr.*

<sup>3</sup> See his portraits, and in particular his bust.

istence, he was able to settle down amidst them with a calm and melancholic smile, listening, for the sake of relaxation, to the aerial music of the fancies in which he revelled.<sup>1</sup> I am willing to believe, lastly, that in frame as in other things, he belonged to his great generation and his great age; that with him, as with Rabelais, Titian, Michel Angelo, and Rubens, the solidity of the muscles was a counterpoise to the sensibility of the nerves; that in those days the human machine, more severely tried and more firmly constructed, could withstand the storms of passion and the fire of inspiration; that soul and body were still at equilibrium; that genius was then a blossom, and not, as now, a disease. We can but make conjectures about all this: if we would become acquainted more closely with the man, we must seek him in his works.

## II.

Let us then look for the man, and in his style. The style explains the work; whilst showing the principal features of the genius, it infers the rest. When we have once grasped the dominant faculty, we see the whole artist developed like a flower.

Shakspeare imagines with copiousness and excess; he scatters metaphors profusely over all he writes; every instant abstract ideas are changed into images; it is a series of paintings which is unfolded in his mind. He does not seek them, they come of themselves; they crowd within him, covering his arguments; they dim with their brightness the pure light of logic. He does not labour to explain or prove; picture on picture, image on image, he is for ever copying the strange and splendid

<sup>1</sup> Especially in his later plays: *Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*.

visions which are engendered one after another, and are heaped up within him. Compare to our dull writers this passage, which I take at hazard from a tranquil dialogue :

“ The single and peculiar life is bound,  
With all the strength and armour of the mind,  
To keep itself from noyance ; but much more  
That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest  
The lives of many. The cease of majesty  
Dies not alone ; but, like a gulf, doth draw  
What's near it with it : it is a massy wheel,  
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,  
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things  
Are mortised and adjoin'd ; which, when it falls,  
Each small annexment, petty consequence,  
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone  
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.”<sup>1</sup>

Here we have three successive images to express the same thought. It is a whole blossoming ; a bough grows from the trunk, from that another, which is multiplied into numerous fresh branches. Instead of a smooth road, traced by a regular line of dry and cunningly-fixed landmarks, you enter a wood, crowded with interwoven trees and luxuriant bushes, which conceal and prevent your progress, which delight and dazzle your eyes by the magnificence of their verdure and the wealth of their bloom. You are astonished at first, modern mind that you are, business man, used to the clear dissertations of classical poetry ; you become cross ; you think the author is amusing himself, and that through conceit and bad taste he is misleading you and himself in his garden thickets. By no means ; if he

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, iii. 3.



speaks thus, it is not from choice, but of necessity; metaphor is not his whim, but the form of his thought. In the height of passion, he imagines still. When Hamlet, in despair, remembers his father's noble form, he sees the mythological pictures with which the taste of the age filled the very streets:

"A station like the herald Mercury  
New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill." <sup>1</sup>

This charming vision, in the midst of a bloody invective proves that there lurks a painter underneath the poet. Involuntarily and out of season, he tears off the tragic mask which covered his face; and the reader discovers, behind the contracted features of this terrible mask, a graceful and inspired smile which he did not expect to see.

Such an imagination must needs be vehement. Every metaphor is a convulsion. Whosoever involuntarily and naturally transforms a dry idea into an image, has his brain on fire; true metaphors are flaming apparitions, which are like a picture in a flash of lightning. Never, I think, in any nation of Europe, or in any age of history, has so grand a passion been seen. Shakspeare's style is a compound of frenzied expressions. No man has submitted words to such a contortion. Mingled contrasts, tremendous exaggerations, apostrophes, exclamations the whole fury of the ode, confusion of ideas, accumulation of images, the horrible and the divine, jumbled into the same line; it seems to my fancy as though he never writes a word without shouting it. 'What have I done?' the queen asks Hamlet. He answers:

<sup>1</sup> Act III. Sc. 4.

“ Such an act  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,  
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows  
As false as dicers’ oaths : O, such a deed  
As from the body of contraction plucks  
The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
A rhapsody of words : Heaven’s face doth glow ;  
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,  
With tristful visage, as against the doom,  
Is thought-sick at the act.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the style of phrensy. Yet I have not given all. The metaphors are all exaggerated, the ideas all verge on the absurd. All is transformed and disfigured by the whirlwind of passion. The contagion of the crime, which he denounces, has marred all nature. He no longer sees anything in the world but corruption and lying. To vilify the virtuous were little ; he vilifies virtue herself. Inanimate things are sucked into this whirlpool of grief. The sky’s red tint at sunset, the pallid darkness spread by night over the landscape, become the blush and the pallor of shame, and the wretched man who speaks and weeps sees the whole world totter with him in the dimness of despair.

Hamlet, it will be said, is half-mad ; this explains the vehemence of his expressions. The truth is that Hamlet, here, is Shakspeare. Be the situation terrible or peaceful, whether he is engaged on an invective or a conversation, the style is excessive throughout. Shakspeare never sees things tranquilly. All the powers of his mind are concentrated in the present

<sup>1</sup> Act iii. Sc. 4.

image or idea. He is buried and absorbed in it. With such a genius, we are on the brink of an abyss; the eddying water dashes in headlong, swallowing up whatever objects it meets, and only bringing them to light transformed and mutilated. We pause stupefied before these convulsive metaphors, which might have been written by a fevered hand in a night's delirium, which gather a pageful of ideas and pictures in half a sentence, which scorch the eyes they would enlighten. Words lose their meaning; constructions are put out of joint; paradoxes of style, apparently false expressions, which a man might occasionally venture upon with diffidence in the transport of his rapture, become the ordinary language. Shakspeare dazzles, repels, terrifies, disgusts, oppresses; his verses are a piercing and sublime song, pitched in too high a key, above the reach of our organs, which offends our ears, of which our mind alone can divine the justice and beauty.

Yet this is little; for that singular force of concentration is redoubled by the suddenness of the dash which calls it into existence. In Shakspeare there is no preparation, no adaptation, no development, no care to make himself understood. Like a too fiery and powerful horse, he bounds, but cannot run. He bridges in a couple of words an enormous interval; is at the two poles in a single instant. The reader vainly looks for the intermediate track; dazed by these prodigious leaps, he wonders by what miracle the poet has entered upon a new idea the very moment when he quitted the last, seeing perhaps between the two images a long scale of transitions, which we mount with difficulty step by step, but which he has spanned in a stride. Shakspeare flies, we creep. Hence comes a

style made up of conceits, bold images shattered in an instant by others still bolder, barely indicated ideas completed by others far removed, no visible connection, but a visible incoherence; at every step we halt, the track failing; and there, far above us, lo, stands the poet, and we find that we have ventured in his foot-steps, through a craggy land, full of precipices, which he threads, as if it were a straightforward road, but on which our greatest efforts barely carry us along.

What will you think, further, if we observe that these vehement expressions, so natural in their upwelling, instead of following one after the other, slowly and with effort, are hurled out by hundreds, with an impetuous ease and abundance, like the bubbling waves from a welling spring, which are heaped together, rise one above another, and find nowhere room enough to spread and exhaust themselves? You may find in *Romeo and Juliet* a score of examples of this inexhaustible inspiration. The two lovers pile up an infinite mass of metaphors, impassioned exaggerations, clenches contorted phrases, amorous extravagances. Their language is like the trill of nightingales. Shakspeare's wits, Mercutio, Beatrice, Rosalind, his clowns, buffoons, sparkle with far-fetched jokes, which rattle out like a volley of musketry. There is none of them but provides enough play on words to stock a whole theatre. Lear's curses, or Queen Margaret's, would suffice for all the madmen in an asylum, or all the oppressed of the earth. The sonnets are a delirium of ideas and images, laboured at with an obstinacy enough to make a man giddy. His first poem, *Venus and Adonis*, is the sensual ecstasy of a Correggio, insatiable and excited. This exuberant fecundity intensifies qualities already in

excess, and multiplies a hundred-fold the luxuriance of metaphor, the incoherence of style, and the unbridled vehemence of expression.<sup>1</sup>

All that I have said may be compressed into a few words. Objects were taken into his mind organised and complete; they pass into ours disjointed, decomposed, fragmentarily. He thought in the lump, we think piecemeal; hence his style and our style—two languages not to be reconciled. We, for our part, writers and reasoners, can note precisely by a word each isolated fraction of an idea, and represent the due order of its parts by the due order of our expressions. We advance gradually; we follow the filiations, refer continually to the roots, try and treat our words as numbers, our sentences as equations; we employ but general terms, which every mind can understand, and regular constructions, into which any mind can enter; we attain justness and clearness, not life. Shakspeare lets justness and clearness look out for themselves, and attains life. From amidst his complex conception and his coloured semi-vision he grasps a fragment, a quivering fibre, and shows it; it is for you, from this fragment, to divine the rest. He, behind the word, has a whole picture, an attitude, a long argument abridged, a mass of swarming ideas; you know them, these abbreviative, condensive words: these are they which we launch out amidst the fire of invention, in a fit of passion—words of slang or of fashion, which appeal to local memory or individual experience;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is why, in the eyes of a writer of the seventeenth century, Shakspeare's style is the most obscure, pretentious, painful, barbarous, and absurd, that could be imagined.

<sup>2</sup> Shakspeare's vocabulary is the most copious of all. It comprises about 15,000 words; Milton's only 8000.

little desultory and incorrect phrases, which, by their irregularity, express the suddenness and the breaks of the inner sensation ; trivial words, exaggerated figures.<sup>1</sup> There is a gesture beneath each, a quick contraction of the brows, a curl of laughing lips, a clown's trick, an unhinging of the whole machine. None of them mark ideas, all suggest images ; each is the extremity and issue of a complete mimic action ; none is the expression and definition of a partial and limited idea. This is why Shakspeare is strange and powerful, obscure and creative, beyond all the poets of his or any other age ; the most immoderate of all violators of language, the most marvellous of all creators of souls, the farthest removed from regular logic and classical reason, the one most capable of exciting in us a world of forms and of placing living beings before us.

### III.

Let us reconstruct this world, so as to find in it the imprint of its creator. A poet does not copy at random the manners which surround him ; he selects from this vast material, and involuntarily brings upon the stage the habits of the heart and conduct which best suit his talent. If he is a logician, a moralist, an orator, as, for instance, one of the French great tragic poets (Racine) of the seventeenth century, he will only represent noble manners ; he will avoid low characters ; he will have a horror of menials and the plebs ; he will observe the greatest decorum amidst the strongest outbreaks of passion ; he will reject as scandalous every low or inde-

<sup>1</sup> See the conversation of Laertes and his sister, and of Laertes and Polonius, in *Hamlet*. The style is foreign to the situation ; and we see here plainly the natural and necessary process of Shakspeare's thought.

cent word ; he will give us reason, loftiness, good taste throughout ; he will suppress the familiarity, childishness, artlessness, gay banter of domestic life ; he will blot out precise details, special traits, and will carry tragedy into a serene and sublime region, where his abstract personages, unencumbered by time and space, after an exchange of eloquent harangues and able dissertations, will kill each other becomingly, and as though they were merely concluding a ceremony. Shakspeare does just the contrary, because his genius is the exact opposite. His master faculty is an impassioned imagination, freed from the shackles of reason and morality. He abandons himself to it, and finds in man nothing that he would care to lop off. He accepts nature and finds it beautiful in its entirety. He paints it in its littlenesses, its deformities, its weaknesses, its excesses, its irregularities, and in its rages ; he exhibits man at his meals, in bed, at play, drunk, mad, sick ; he adds that which ought not to be seen to that which passes on the stage. He does not dream of ennobling, but of copying human life, and aspires only to make his copy more energetic and more striking than the original.

Hence the morals of this drama ; and first, the want of dignity. Dignity arises from self-command. A man selects the most noble of his acts and attitudes, and allows himself no other. Shakspeare's characters select none, but allow themselves all. His kings are men, and fathers of families. The terrible Leontes who is about to order the death of his wife and his friend, plays like a child with his son : caresses him, gives him all the pretty pet names which mothers are wont to employ ; he dares be trivial ; he gabbles like a nurse ; he has her language and fulfils her duties :

"*Leontes*. What, hast smutch'd thy nose ?  
 They say it is a copy out of mine. Come, captain,  
 We must be neat ; not neat, but cleanly, captain : . . .  
 Come, sir page,  
 Look on me with your welkin eye : sweet villain !  
 Most dear'st ! my collop . . . Looking on the lines  
 Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil  
 Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech'd,  
 In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled,  
 Lest it should bite its master. . . .  
 How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,  
 This squash, this gentleman ! . . . My brother,  
 Are you so fond of your young prince as we  
 Do seem to be of ours ?

*Polixenes*. If at home, sir,  
 He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter,  
 Now my sworn friend and then mine enemy,  
 My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all :  
 He makes a July's day short as December,  
 And with his varying childness cures in me  
 Thoughts that would thicken my blood."<sup>1</sup>

There are a score of such passages in Shakspeare. The great passions, with him as in nature, are preceded or followed by trivial actions, small-talk, commonplace sentiments. Strong emotions are accidents in our life : to drink, to eat, to talk of indifferent things, to carry out mechanically an habitual duty, to dream of some stale pleasure or some ordinary annoyance, that is in which we employ all our time. Shakspeare paints us as we are ; his heroes bow, ask people for news, speak of rain and fine weather, as often and as casually as ourselves, on the very eve of falling into the extremity of misery, or of plunging into fatal resolutions. Hamlet asks

<sup>1</sup> *Winter's Tale*, i. 2.



what's o'clock, finds the wind biting, talks of feasts and music heard without; and this quiet talk, so unconnected with the action, so full of slight, insignificant facts, which chance alone has raised up and guided, lasts until the moment when his father's ghost, rising in the darkness, reveals the assassination which it is his duty to avenge.

Reason tells us that our manners should be measured; this is why the manners which Shakspeare paints are not so. Pure nature is violent, passionate: it admits no excuses, suffers no middle course, takes no count of circumstances, wills blindly, breaks out into railing, has the irrationality, ardour, anger of children. Shakspeare's characters have hot blood and a ready hand. They cannot restrain themselves, they abandon themselves at once to their grief, indignation, love, and plunge desperately down the steep slope, where their passion urges them. How many need I quote? Timon, Posthumus, Cressida, all the young girls, all the chief characters in the great dramas; everywhere Shakspeare paints the unreflecting impetuosity of the impulse of the moment. Capulet tells his daughter Juliet that in three days she is to marry Earl Paris, and bids her be proud of it; she answers that she is not proud of it, and yet she thanks the earl for this proof of love. Compare Capulet's fury with the anger of Orgon,<sup>1</sup> and you may measure the difference of the two poets and the two civilisations:

"*Capulet.* How now, how now, chop-logic! What is this?  
'Proud,' and 'I thank you,' and 'I thank you not;'  
And yet 'not proud,' mistress minion, you,  
Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,

<sup>1</sup> One of Molière's characters in *Tartuffe*.—Ta.

But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,  
 To go with Paris to Saint Peter's church,  
 Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.  
 Out, you green-sickness carrion ! out, you baggage !  
 You tallow-face !

*Juliet.* Good father, I beseech you on my knees,  
 Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

*C.* Hang thee, young baggage ! disobedient wretch !  
 I tell thee what : get thee to church o' Thursday,  
 Or never after look me in the face :  
 Speak not, reply not, do not answer me ;  
 My fingers itch. . . .

*Lady C.* You are too hot.

*C.* God's bread ! it makes me mad :  
 Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,  
 Alone, in company, still my care hath been  
 To have her match'd : and having now provided  
 A gentleman of noble parentage,  
 Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,  
 Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,  
 Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man ;  
 And then to have a wretched puling fool,  
 A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,  
 To answer, '*I'll not wed ; I cannot love,  
 I am too young ; I pray you, pardon me,*'—  
 But, an you will not wed, I'll pardon you :  
 Graze where you will, you shall not house with me :  
 Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.  
 Thursday is near ; lay hand on heart, advise :  
 An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend ;  
 An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,  
 For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee."<sup>1</sup>

This method of exhorting one's child to marry is  
 peculiar to Shakspeare and the sixteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, iii. 5.

Contradiction to these men was like a red rag to a bull; it drove them mad.

We might be sure that in this age, and on this stage, decency was a thing unknown. It is wearisome, being a check; men got rid of it, because it was wearisome. It is a gift of reason and morality; as indecency is produced by nature and passion. Shakspeare's words are too indecent to be translated. His characters call things by their dirty names, and compel the thoughts to particular images of physical love. The talk of gentlemen and ladies is full of coarse allusions; we should have to find out an alehouse of the lowest description to hear like words nowadays.<sup>1</sup>

It would be in an alehouse too that we should have to look for the rude jests and brutal kind of wit which form the staple of these conversations. Kindly politeness is the slow fruit of advanced reflection; it is a sort of humanity and kindliness applied to small acts and everyday discourse; it bids man soften towards others, and forget himself for the sake of others; it constrains genuine nature, which is selfish and gross. This is why it is absent from the manners of the drama we are considering. You will see carmen, out of sportiveness and good humour, deal one another hard blows; so it is pretty well with the conversation of the lords and ladies of Shakspeare who are in a sportive mood; for instance, Beatrice and Benedick, very well bred folk as things go,<sup>2</sup> with a great reputation for wit and politeness, whose smart retorts create amusement

<sup>1</sup> *Henry VIII.* ii. 3, and many other scenes.

<sup>2</sup> *Much Ado about Nothing.* See also the manner in which Henry V. in Shakspeare's *King Henry V.* pays court to Katharine of France (v. 2).

for the bystanders. These "skirmishes of wit" consist in telling one another plainly: You are a coward, a glutton, an idiot, a buffoon, a rake, a brute! You are a parrot's tongue, a fool, a . . . (the word is there). Benedick says:

"I will go . . . to the Antipodes . . . rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy. . . . I cannot endure my Lady Tongue. . . .

*Don Pedro.* You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.

*Beatrice.* So I would not he should do me, my lord, lest I should prove the mother of fools."<sup>1</sup>

We can infer the tone they use when in anger. Emilia, in *Othello*, says:

"He call'd her whore; a beggar in his drink  
Could not have laid such terms upon his callat."<sup>2</sup>

They have a vocabulary of foul words as complete as that of Rabelais, and they exhaust it. They catch up handfuls of mud, and hurl it at their enemy, not conceiving themselves to be smirched.

Their actions correspond. They go without shame or pity to the limits of their passion. They kill, poison, violate, burn; the stage is full of abominations. Shakspeare lugs upon the stage all the atrocious deeds of the civil wars. These are the ways of wolves and hyenas. We must read of Jack Cade's sedition<sup>3</sup> to gain an idea of this madness and fury. We might imagine we were seeing infuriated beasts, the murderous recklessness of a wolf in a sheepfold, the brutality of a hog fouling and rolling himself in filth and blood.

<sup>1</sup> *Much Ado about Nothing*, ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Act iv. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Second Part of Henry VII.* iv. 6.

They destroy, kill, butcher each other; with their feet in the blood of their victims, they call for food and drink; they stick heads on pikes and make them kiss one another, and they laugh.

"*Jack Cade.* There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny. . . . There shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery. . . . And here sitting upon London-stone, I charge and command that, of the city's cost, the passing-conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign. . . . Away, burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England. . . . And henceforth all things shall be in common. . . . What canst thou answer to my majesty for giving up of Normandy unto Mounsieur Basimecu, the dauphin of France? . . . The proudest peer in the realm shall not wear a head on his shoulders, unless he pay me tribute; there shall not a maid be married, but she shall pay to me her maidenhead ere they have it. (*Re-enter rebels with the heads of Lord Say and his son-in-law.*) But is not this braver? Let them kiss one another, for they loved well when they were alive."<sup>1</sup>

Man must not be let loose; we know not what lusts and rage may brood under a sober guise. Nature was never so hideous, and this hideousness is the truth.

Are these cannibal manners only met with among the scum? Why, the princes are worse. The Duke of Cornwall orders the old Earl of Gloucester to be tied to a chair, because, owing to him King Lear has escaped:

"Fellows, hold the chair.

Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

(*Gloucester is held down in the chair, while Cornwall plucks out one of his eyes, and sets his foot on it.*)

<sup>1</sup> *Henry VI.* 2d part, iv. 2, 6, 7.

*Gloster.* He that will think to live till he be old,  
Give me some help ! O cruel : O you gods !

*Regan.* One side will mock another ; the other too.

*Cornwall.* If you see vengeance,—

*Servant.* Hold your hand, my lord :  
I have served you ever since I was a child ;  
But better service have I never done you,  
Than now to bid you hold.

*Regan.* How now, you dog !

*Serv.* If you did wear a beard upon your chin,  
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean ?

*Corn.* My villain ! *(Draws and runs at him.)*

*Serv.* Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

*(Draws ; they fight ; Cornwall is wounded.)*

*Regan.* Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus.

*(Snatches a sword, comes behind, and stabs him.)*

*Serv.* O, I am slain ! My lord, you have one eye left  
To see some mischief on him. O ! *(Dies.)*

*Corn.* Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly !  
Where is thy lustre now !

*Gloster.* All dark and comfortless. Where's my son ! . . .

*Regan.* Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell  
His way to Dover." <sup>1</sup>

Such are the manners of that stage. They are unbridled, like those of the age, and like the poet's imagination. To copy the common actions of every-day life, the puerilities and feeblenesses to which the greatest continually sink, the outbursts of passion which degrade them, the indecent, harsh, or foul words, the atrocious deeds in which licence revels, the brutality and ferocity of primitive nature, is the work of a free and unencumbered imagination. To copy this hideousness and these excesses with a selection of such familiar, signi-

<sup>1</sup> *King Lear*, iii. 7.

ficant, precise details, that they reveal under every word of every personage a complete civilisation, is the work of a concentrated and all-powerful imagination. This species of manners and this energy of description indicate the same faculty, unique and excessive, which the style had already indicated.

## IV.

On this common background stands out in striking relief a population of distinct living figures, illuminated by an intense light. This creative power is Shakspeare's great gift, and it communicates an extraordinary significance to his words. Every phrase pronounced by one of his characters enables us to see, besides the idea which it contains and the emotion which prompted it, the aggregate of the qualities and the entire character which produced it—the mood, physical attitude, bearing, look of the man, all instantaneously, with a clearness and force approached by no one. The words which strike our ears are not the thousandth part of those we hear within; they are like sparks thrown off here and there; the eyes catch rare flashes of flame; the mind alone perceives the vast conflagration of which they are the signs and the effect. He gives us two dramas in one: the first strange, convulsive, curtailed, visible; the other consistent, immense, invisible; the one covers the other so well, that as a rule we do not realise that we are perusing words: we hear the roll of those terrible voices, we see contracted features, glowing eyes, pallid faces; we see the agitation, the furious resolutions which mount to the brain with the feverish blood, and descend to the sharp-strung nerves. This property possessed by every phrase to exhibit a world of sentiments and

forms, comes from the fact that the phrase is actually caused by a world of emotions and images. Shakspeare, when he wrote, felt all that we feel, and much besides. He had the prodigious faculty of seeing in a twinkling of the eye a complete character, body, mind, past and present, in every detail and every depth of his being, with the exact attitude and the expression of face, which the situation demanded. A word here and there of Hamlet or Othello would need for its explanation three pages of commentaries; each of the half-understood thoughts, which the commentator may have discovered, has left its trace in the turn of the phrase, in the nature of the metaphor, in the order of the words; nowadays, in pursuing these traces, we divine the thoughts. These innumerable traces have been impressed in a second, within the compass of a line. In the next line there are as many, impressed just as quickly, and in the same compass. You can gauge the concentration and the velocity of the imagination which creates thus.

These characters are all of the same family. Good or bad, gross or delicate, witty or stupid, Shakspeare gives them all the same kind of spirit which is his own. He has made of them imaginative people, void of will and reason, impassioned machines, vehemently jostled one against another, who were outwardly whatever is most natural and most abandoned in human nature. Let us act the play to ourselves, and see in all its stages this clanship of figures, this prominence of portraits.

Lowest of all are the stupid folk, babbling or brutish. Imagination already exists there, where reason is not yet born; it exists also there where reason is dead. The idiot and the brute blindly follow the phantoms which exist in their benumbed or mechanical brains.



No poet has understood this mechanism like Shakspeare. His Caliban, for instance, a deformed savage, fed on roots, growls like a beast under the hand of Prospero, who has subdued him. He howls continually against his master, though he knows that every curse will be paid back with "cramps and aches." He is a chained wolf, trembling and fierce, who tries to bite when approached, and who crouches when he sees the lash raised. He has a foul sensuality, a loud base laugh, the gluttony of degraded humanity. He wished to violate Miranda in her sleep. He cries for his food, and gorges himself when he gets it. A sailor who had landed in the island, Stephano, gives him wine; he kisses his feet, and takes him for a god; he asks if he has not dropped from heaven, and adores him. We find in him rebellious and baffled passions, which are eager to rise again and to be satiated. Stephano had beaten his comrade. Caliban cries, "Beat him enough: after a little time I'll beat him too." He prays Stephano to come with him and murder Prospero in his sleep; he thirsts to lead him there, dances through joy and sees his master already with his "weasand" cut, and his brains scattered on the earth:

"Prithee, my king, be quiet. See'st thou here,  
This is the mouth o' the cell: no noise, and enter.  
Do that good mischief which may make this island  
Thine own for ever, and I, thy Caliban,  
For aye thy foot-licker."<sup>1</sup>

Others, like Ajax and Cloten, are more like men, and yet it is pure mood that Shakspeare depicts in them, as in Caliban. The clogging corporeal machine, the

<sup>1</sup> *The Tempest*, iv. 1.

mass of muscles, the thick blood sluggishly moving along in the veins of these fighting men, oppress the intelligence, and leave no life but for animal passions. Ajax uses his fists, and devours meat; that is his existence; if he is jealous of Achilles, it is pretty much as a bull is jealous of his fellow. He permits himself to be restrained and led by Ulysses, without looking before him: the grossest flattery decoys him. The Greeks have urged him to accept Hector's challenge. Behold him puffed up with pride, scorning to answer anyone, not knowing what he says or does. Thersites cries, "Good-morrow, Ajax;" and he replies, "Thanks, Agamemnon." He has no further thought than to contemplate his enormous frame, and roll majestically his big stupid eyes. When the day of the fight has come, he strikes at Hector as on an anvil. After a good while they are separated. "I am not warm yet," says Ajax, "let us fight again."<sup>1</sup> Cloten is less massive than this phlegmatic ox; but he is just as idiotic, just as vainglorious, just as coarse. The beautiful Imogen, urged by his insults and his scullion manners, tells him that his whole body is not worth as much as Posthumus' meanest garment. He is stung to the quick, repeats the word several times; he cannot shake off the idea, and runs at it again and again with his head down, like an angry ram:

"Cloten. 'His garment!' Now, the devil—

Imogen. To Dorothy my woman hie thee presently—

C. 'His garment!' . . . You have abused me: 'His meanest garment!' . . . I'll be revenged: 'His meanest garment!' Well."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Troilus and Cressida*, ii. 3, the jesting manner in which the generals drive on this fierce brute.

<sup>2</sup> *Cymbeline*, ii. 3.

He gets some of Posthumus' garments, and goes to Milford Haven, expecting to meet Imogen there. On his way he mutters thus :

"With that suit upon my back, will I ravish her : first kill him, and in her eyes ; there shall she see my valour, which will then be a torment to her contempt. He on the ground, my speech of insultment ended on his dead body, and when my lust has dined,—which, as I say, to vex her I will execute in the clothes that she so praised,—to the court I'll knock her back, foot her home again."<sup>1</sup>

Others again, are but babblers : for example, Polonius, the grave brainless counsellor ; a great baby, not yet out of his "swathing clouts ;" a solemn booby, who rains on men a shower of counsels, compliments, and maxims ; a sort of court speaking-trumpet, useful in grand ceremonies, with the air of a thinker, but fit only to spout words. But the most complete of all these characters is that of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, a gossip, loose in her talk, a regular kitchen oracle, smelling of the stew-pan and old boots, foolish, impudent, immoral, but otherwise a good creature, and affectionate to her nurse-child. Mark this disjointed and never-ending gossip's babble :

"*Nurse*. 'Faith I can tell her age unto an hour.

*Lady Capulet*. She's not fourteen. . . .

*Nurse*. Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen.

Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls !—

Were of an age : well, Susan is with God ;

She was too good for me : but, as I said,

On Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen ;

That shall she, marry ; I remember it well.

<sup>1</sup> *Cymbeline*, iii. 5.

'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years ;  
And she was wean'd,—I never shall forget it,—  
Of all the days of the year, upon that day :  
For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,  
Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall ;  
My lord and you were then at Mantua :—  
Nay, I do bear a brain :—but, as I said,  
When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple  
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,  
To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug !  
Shake, quoth the dove-house : 'twas no need, I trow,  
To bid me trudge :  
And since that time it is eleven years ;  
For then she could stand alone ; nay, by the rood,  
She could have run and waddled all about ;  
For even the day before, she broke her brow." <sup>1</sup>

Then she tells an indecent anecdote, which she begins over again four times. She is silenced : what then ? She has her anecdote in her head, and cannot cease repeating it and laughing to herself. Endless repetitions are the mind's first step. The vulgar do not pursue the straight line of reasoning and of the story ; they repeat their steps, as it were merely marking time : struck with an image, they keep it for an hour before their eyes, and are never tired of it. If they do advance, they turn aside to a hundred subordinate ideas before they get at the phrase required. They allow themselves to be diverted by all the thoughts which come across them. This is what the nurse does ; and when she brings Juliet news of her lover, she torments and wearies her, less from a wish to tease than from a habit of wandering from the point :

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 3.

"Nurse. Jesu, what haste! can you not stay awhile?  
Do you not see that I am out of breath?

Juliet. How art thou out of breath, when thou hast breath  
To say to me that thou art out of breath?  
Is thy news good, or bad? answer to that;  
Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance:  
Let me be satisfied: is't good or bad?

N. Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how  
to choose a man: Romeo! no, not he: though his face be better  
than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand and  
a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they  
are past compare: he is not the flower of courtesy, but, I'll  
warrant him, as gentle as a lamb. Go thy ways, wench; serve  
God. What, have you dined at home?

J. No, no: but all this did I know before.  
What says he of our marriage? what of that?

N. Lord, how my head aches! what a head have I!  
It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.  
My back o' t'other side,—O, my back, my back!  
Beswore your heart for sending me about,  
To catch my death with jaunting up and down!

J. I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.  
Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

N. Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous,  
and a kind, and a handsome, and, I warrant, a virtuous,—  
Where is your mother?"<sup>1</sup>

It is never-ending. Her gabble is worse when she comes to announce to Juliet the death of her cousin and the banishment of Romeo. It is the shrill cry and chatter of an overgrown asthmatic magpie. She laments, confuses the names, spins roundabout sentences, ends by asking for *aqua-vita*. She curses Romeo, then brings him to Juliet's chamber. Next day Juliet is

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 5.

ordered to marry Earl Paris ; Juliet throws herself into her nurse's arms, praying for comfort, advice, assistance. The other finds the true remedy : Marry Paris,

“ O, he's a lovely gentleman !  
Romeo's a dishclout to him : an eagle, madam,  
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye  
As Paris hath. Beahrew my very heart,  
I think you are happy in this second match,  
For it excels your first.”<sup>1</sup>

This cool immorality, these weather-cock arguments, this fashion of estimating love like a fishwoman, completes the portrait.

#### V.

The mechanical imagination produces Shakspeare's fool-characters : a quick venturesome dazzling, unquiet imagination, produces his men of wit. Of wit there are many kinds. One, altogether French, which is but reason, a foe to paradox, scorner of folly, a sort of incisive common sense, having no occupation but to render truth amusing and evident, the most effective weapon with an intelligent and vain people : such was the wit of Voltaire and the drawing-rooms. The other, that of improvisatores and artists, is a mere inventive rapture, paradoxical, unshackled, exuberant, a sort of self-entertainment, a phantasmagoria of images, flashes of wit, strange ideas, dazing and intoxicating, like the movement and illumination in a ball-room. Such is the wit of Mercutio, of the clowns, of Beatrice, Rosalind, and Benedick. They laugh, not from a sense of the ridiculous, but from the desire to laugh. You must

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, iii. 5.

look elsewhere for the campaigns which aggressive reason makes against human folly. Here folly is in its full bloom. Our folk think of amusement, and nothing more. They are good-humoured; they let their wit prance gaily over the possible and the impossible. They play upon words, contort their sense, draw absurd and laughable inferences, send them back to one another, and without intermission, as if with shuttlecocks, and vie with each other in singularity and invention. They dress all their ideas in strange or sparkling metaphors. The taste of the time was for masquerades; their conversation is a masquerade of ideas. They say nothing in a simple style; they only seek to heap together subtle things, far-fetched, difficult to invent and to understand; all their expressions are over-refined, unexpected, extraordinary; they strain their thought, and change it into a caricature. "Alas, poor Romeo!" says Mercutio, "he is already dead; stabbed with a white wench's black eye; shot through the ear with a love-song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft."<sup>1</sup> Benedick relates a conversation he has just held with his mistress: "O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! an oak, but with one green leaf on it would have answered her; my very visor began to assume life, and scold with her."<sup>2</sup> These gay and perpetual extravagances show the bearing of the speakers. They do not remain quietly seated in their chairs, like the Marquesses in the *Misanthrope*; they whirl round, leap, paint their faces, gesticulate boldly their ideas; their wit-rockets end with a song. Young folk, soldiers and artists, they let off their fireworks of phrases, and gambol round about. "There

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 4.<sup>2</sup> *Much Ado about Nothing*, ii. 1.

was a star danced, and under that was I born.”<sup>1</sup> This expression of Beatrice’s aptly describes the kind of poetical, sparkling, unreasoning, charming wit, more akin to music than to literature, a sort of dream, which is spoken out aloud, and whilst wide awake, not unlike that described by Mercutio :

“ O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
She is the fairies’ midwife ; and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the fore-finger of an alderman,  
Drawn with a team of little atomies  
Athwart men’s noses as they lie asleep ;  
Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners’ legs,  
The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,  
The traces of the smallest spider’s web,  
The collars of the moonshine’s watery beams,  
Her whip of cricket’s bone, the lash of film,  
Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,  
Not half so big as a round little worm  
Prick’d from the lazy finger of a maid ;  
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,  
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,  
Time out o’ mind the fairies’ coachmakers.  
And in this state she gallops night by night  
Through lovers’ brains, and then they dream of love ;  
O’er courtiers’ knees, that dream on court’sies straight,  
O’er lawyers’ fingers, who straight dream on fees,  
O’er ladies’ lips, who straight on kisses dream. . . .  
Sometime she gallops o’er a courtier’s nose,  
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit ;  
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig’s tail  
Tickling a parson’s nose as a’ lies asleep,  
Then dreams he of another benefice :

<sup>1</sup> *Much ado About Nothing*, II. 2.



Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,  
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,  
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,  
Of healths five-fathom deep ; and then anon  
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,  
And being thus frightened swears a prayer or two  
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab  
That plats the manes of horses in the night,  
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,  
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes. . . .  
This is she"<sup>1</sup> . . .

Romeo interrupts him, or he would never end. Let the reader compare with the dialogue of the French theatre this little poem,

"Child of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,"<sup>2</sup>

introduced without incongruity in the midst of a conversation of the sixteenth century, and he will understand the difference between the wit which devotes itself to reasoning, or to record a subject for laughter, and that imagination which is self-amused with its own act.

Falstaff has the passions of an animal, and the imagination of a man of wit. There is no character which better exemplifies the fire and immorality of Shakspeare. Falstaff is a great supporter of disreputable places, swearer, gamester, idler, wine-bibber, as low as he well can be. He has a big belly, bloodshot eyes, bloated face, shaking legs ; he spends his life with his elbows among the tavern-jugs, or asleep on the ground behind the arras ; he only wakes to curse, lie, brag, and steal.

<sup>1</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 4.

*Ibid.*

He is as big a swindler as Panurge, who had sixty-three ways of making money, "of which the honestest was by sly theft." And what is worse, he is an old man, a knight, a courtier, and well educated. Must he not be odious and repulsive? By no means; we cannot help liking him. At bottom, like his brother Panurge, he is "the best fellow in the world." He has no malice in his composition; no other wish than to laugh and be amused. When insulted, he bawls out louder than his attackers, and pays them back with interest in coarse words and insults; but he owes them no grudge for it. The next minute he is sitting down with them in a low tavern, drinking their health like a brother and comrade. If he has vices, he exposes them so frankly that we are obliged to forgive him them. He seems to say to us "Well, so I am, what then? I like drinking: isn't the wine good? I take to my heels when hard hitting begins; don't blows hurt? I get into debt, and do fools out of their money; isn't it nice to have money in your pocket? I brag; isn't it natural to want to be well thought of?"—"Dost thou hear, Hal? thou knowest, in the state of innocency, Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villany? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty."<sup>1</sup> Falstaff is so frankly immoral, that he ceases to be so. Conscience ends at a certain point; nature assumes its place, and man rushes upon what he desires, without more thought of being just or unjust than an animal in the neighbouring wood. Falstaff, engaged in recruiting, has sold exemptions to all the rich people, and only enrolled starved and half-naked wretches. There's but a shirt

<sup>1</sup> First Part of *King Henry IV.*, iii. 2.

and a half in all his company: that does not trouble him. Bah: "they'll find linen enough on every hedge." The prince, who has seen them, says, "I did never see such pitiful rascals." "Tut, tut," answers Falstaff, "good enough to toss; food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better; tush, man, mortal men, mortal men."<sup>1</sup> His second excuse is his unfailing spirit. If ever there was a man who could jabber, it is he. Insults and oaths, curses, jobations, protests, flow from him as from an open barrel. He is never at a loss; he devises a shift for every difficulty. Lies sprout out of him, fructify, increase, beget one another, like mushrooms on a rich and rotten bed of earth. He lies still more from his imagination and nature than from interest and necessity. It is evident from the manner in which he strains his fictions. He says he has fought alone against two men. The next moment it is four. Presently we have seven, then eleven, then fourteen. He is stopped in time, or he would soon be talking of a whole army. When unmasked, he does not lose his temper, and is the first to laugh at his boastings. "Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold. . . . What, shall we be merry? shall we have a play extempore?"<sup>2</sup> He does the scolding part of King Henry with so much truth, that we might take him for a king, or an actor. This big pot-bellied fellow, a coward, a cynic, a brawler, a drunkard, a lewd rascal, a pothouse poet, is one of Shakspeare's favourites. The reason is, that his morals are those of pure nature, and Shakspeare's mind is congenial with his own.

<sup>1</sup> First Part of *King Henry IV.*, iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 4.

## VI.

Nature is shameless and gross amidst this mass of flesh, heavy with wine and fatness. It is delicate in the delicate body of women, but as unreasoning and impassioned in Desdemona as in Falstaff. Shakspeare's women are charming children, who feel in excess and love passionately. They have unconstrained manners, little rages, nice words of friendship, a coquettish rebelliousness, a graceful volubility, which recall the warbling and the prettiness of birds. The heroines of the French stage are almost men; these are women and in every sense of the word. More imprudent than Desdemona a woman could not be. She is moved with pity for Cassio, and asks a favour for him passionately, recklessly, be the thing just or no, dangerous or no. She knows nothing of man's laws, and does not think of them. All that she sees is, that Cassio is unhappy :—

“ Be thou assured, good Cassio . . . My lord shall never rest ;  
I'll watch him, tame and talk him out of patience ;  
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift ;  
I'll intermingle everything he does  
With Cassio's suit.”<sup>1</sup>

She asks her favour :

“ *Othello*. Not now, sweet Desdemona ; some other time.

*Desdemona*. But shall't be shortly ?

*O*. The sooner, sweet, for you.

*Des*. Shall't be to-night at supper ?

*O*. No, not to-night.

*Des*. To-morrow dinner, then ?

*O*. I shall not dine at home ;

I meet the captains at the citadel.

<sup>1</sup> *Othello*, III. 2.

*Des.* Why, then, to-morrow night ; or Tuesday morn ;  
 On Tuesday noon, or night ; on Wednesday morn ;  
 I prithee, name the time, but let it not  
 Exceed three days : in faith, he's penitent." <sup>1</sup>

She is somewhat astonished to see herself refused : she scolds Othello. He yields : who would not yield seeing a reproach in those lovely sulking eyes ? O, says she, with a pretty pout :

" This is not a boon ;  
 'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,  
 Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,  
 Or sue to you to do peculiar profit  
 To your own person." <sup>2</sup>

A moment after, when he prays her to leave him alone for a while, mark the innocent gaiety, the ready curtsy, the playful child's tone :

" Shall I deny you ? no : farewell, my lord. . . .  
 Emilia, come : Be as your fancies teach you ;  
 Whate'er you be, I am obedient." <sup>3</sup>

This vivacity, this petulance, does not prevent shrinking modesty and silent timidity : on the contrary, they spring from a common cause, extreme sensibility. She who feels much and quickly has more reserve and more passion than others ; she breaks out or is silent ; she says nothing or everything. Such is this Imogen

" So tender of rebukes that words are strokes,  
 And strokes death to her." <sup>4</sup>

Such is Virgilia, the sweet wife of Coriolanus ; her heart is not a Roman one ; she is terrified at her husband's victories : when Volumnia describes him

<sup>1</sup> *Othello*, iii. 3.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>4</sup> *Cymbeline*, iii. 5.

stamping on the field of battle, and wiping his bloody brow with his hand, she grows pale :

“ His bloody brow ! O Jupiter, no blood ! . . .  
Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius ! ”<sup>1</sup>

She wishes to forget all that she knows of these dangers ; she dare not think of them. When asked if Coriolanus does not generally return wounded, she cries, “ O, no, no, no.” She avoids this cruel picture, and yet nurses a secret pang at the bottom of her heart. She will not leave the house : “ I’ll not over the threshold till my lord return.”<sup>2</sup> She does not smile, will hardly admit a visitor ; she would blame herself, as for a lack of tenderness, for a moment’s forgetfulness or gaiety. When he does return, she can only blush and weep. This exalted sensibility must needs end in love. All Shakspeare’s women love without measure, and nearly all at first sight. At the first look Juliet casts on Romeo, she says to the nurse :

“ Go, ask his name : if he be married,  
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.”<sup>3</sup>

It is the revelation of their destiny. As Shakspeare has made them, they cannot but love, and they must love till death. But this first look is an ecstasy : and this sudden approach of love is a transport. Miranda seeing Fernando, fancies that she sees “ a thing divine.” She halts motionless, in the amazement of this sudden vision, at the sound of these heavenly harmonies which rise from the depths of her heart. She weeps, on seeing him drag the heavy logs ; with her slender white hands she would do the work whilst he reposed. Her compassion and tenderness carry her away ; she is no longer

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, I. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, I. 5.

mistress of her words, she says what she would not, what her father has forbidden her to disclose, what an instant before she would never have confessed. The too full heart overflows unwittingly, happy, and ashamed at the current of joy and new sensations with which an unknown feeling has flooded her :

“ *Miranda*. I am a fool to weep at what I am glad of. . . .

*Fernando*. Wherefore weep you ?

*M*. At mine unworthiness that dare not offer

What I desire to give, and much less take

What I shall die to want. . . .

I am your wife, if you will marry me ;

If not, I'll die your maid.”<sup>1</sup>

This irresistible invasion of love transforms the whole character. The shrinking and tender Desdemona, suddenly, in full senate, before her father, renounces her father ; dreams not for an instant of asking his pardon, or consoling him. She will leave for Cyprus with Othello, through the enemy's fleet and the tempest. Everything vanishes before the one and adored image which has taken entire and absolute possession of her whole heart. So, extreme evils, bloody resolves, are only the natural sequence of such love. Ophelia becomes mad, Juliet commits suicide ; no one but looks upon such madness and death as necessary. You will not then discover virtue in these souls, for by virtue is implied a determinate desire to do good, and a rational observance of duty. They are only pure through delicacy or love. They recoil from vice as a gross thing, not as an immoral thing. What they feel is not respect for the marriage vow, but adoration of their husband.

<sup>1</sup> *The Tempest*, iii. 1.

"O sweetest, fairest lily!" So Cymbeline speaks of one of these frail and lovely flowers which cannot be torn from the tree to which they have grown, whose least impurity would tarnish their whiteness. When Imogen learns that her husband means to kill her as being faithless, she does not revolt at the outrage; she has no pride, but only love. "False to his bed!" She faints at the thought that she is no longer loved. When Cordelia hears her father, an irritable old man, already almost insane, ask her how she loves him, she cannot make up her mind to say aloud the flattering protestations which her sisters have been lavishing. She is ashamed to display her tenderness before the world, and to buy a dowry by it. He disinherits her, and drives her away; she holds her tongue. And when she afterwards finds him abandoned and mad, she goes on her knees before him, with such a touching emotion, she weeps over that dear insulted head with so gentle a pity, that you might fancy it was the tender voice of a desolate but delighted mother, kissing the pale lips of her child:

"O you kind gods,  
 Cure this great breach in his abused nature!  
 The untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up  
 Of this child-changed father! . . .  
 O my dear father! Restoration hang  
 Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss  
 Repair those violent harms that my two sisters  
 Have in thy reverence made! . . . Was this a face  
 To be opposed against the warring winds?  
 . . . Mine enemy's dog,  
 Though he had bit me, should have stood that night  
 Against my fire. . . .  
 How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *King Lear*, iv. 7.



If, in short, Shakspeare comes across a heroic character, worthy of Corneille, a Roman, such as the mother of Coriolanus, he will explain by passion, what Corneille would have explained by heroism. He will depict it violent and thirsting for the violent feelings of glory. She will not be able to refrain herself. She will break out into accents of triumph when she sees her son crowned; into imprecations of vengeance when she sees him banished. She will descend to the vulgarities of pride and anger; she will abandon herself to mad effusions of joy, to dreams of an ambitious fancy,<sup>1</sup> and will prove once more that the impassioned imagination of Shakspeare has left its trace in all the creatures whom it has called forth.

## VII.

Nothing is easier to such a poet than to create perfect villains. Throughout he is handling the unruly passions which make their character, and he never hits upon the moral law which restrains them; but at the same time, and by the same faculty, he changes the inanimate masks, which the conventions of the stage mould on an identical pattern, into living and illusory figures.

<sup>1</sup> "O ye're well met : the hoarded plague o' the gods  
Requite your love !  
If that I could for weeping, you should hear—  
Nay, and you shall hear some. . . .  
I'll tell thee what ; yet go :  
Nay but thou shalt stay too : I would my son  
Were in Arabia, and thy tribe before him,  
His good sword in his hand."—*Coriolanus*, iv. 2.

See again, *Coriolanus*, i. 3, the frank and abandoned triumph of a woman of the people; "I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man."

How shall a demon be made to look as real as a man? Iago is a soldier of fortune who has roved the world from Syria to England, who, nursed in the lowest ranks, having had close acquaintance with the horrors of the wars of the sixteenth century, had drawn thence the maxims of a Turk and the philosophy of a butcher; principles he has none left. "O my reputation, my reputation!" cries the dishonoured Cassio. "As I am an honest man," says Iago, "I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation."<sup>1</sup> As for woman's virtue, he looks upon it like a man who has kept company with slave-dealers. He estimates Desdemona's love as he would estimate a mare's: that sort of thing lasts so long—then . . . And then he airs an experimental theory with precise details and nasty expressions like a stud doctor. "It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor, nor he his to her. . . . These Moors are changeable in their wills; . . . the food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice."<sup>2</sup> Desdemona on the shore, trying to forget her cares, begs him to sing the praises of her sex. For every portrait he finds the most insulting insinuations. She insists, and bids him take the case of a deserving woman. "Indeed" he replies, "She was a wight, if ever such wight were, . . . to suckle fools and chronicle small beer."<sup>3</sup> He also says, when Desdemona asks him what he would write in praise of her: "O gentle lady do not put me to't; for I am nothing, if not critical."<sup>4</sup> This is the key to his char-

<sup>1</sup> *Othello*, ii. 3.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 3.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 1.<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

acter. He despises man ; to him Desdemona is a little wanton wench, Cassio an elegant word-shaper, Othello a mad bull, Roderigo an ass to be basted, thumped, made to go. He diverts himself by setting these passions at issue ; he laughs at it as at a play. When Othello, swooning, shakes in his convulsions, he rejoices at this capital result : " Work on, my medicine, work ! Thus credulous fools are caught." <sup>1</sup> You would take him for one of the poisoners of the time, studying the effect of a new potion on a dying dog. He only speaks in sarcasms : he has them ready for every one, even for those whom he does not know. When he wakes Brabantio to inform him of the elopement of his daughter, he tells him the matter in coarse terms, sharpening the sting of the bitter pleasantry, like a conscientious executioner, rubbing his hands when he hears the culprit groan under the knife. " Thou art a villain ! " cries Brabantio. " You are — a senator ! " answers Iago. But the feature which really completes him, and makes him take rank with Mephistopheles, is the atrocious truth and the cogent reasoning by which he likens his crime to virtue. <sup>2</sup> Cassio, under his advice, goes to see Desdemona, to obtain her intercession for him ; this visit is to be the ruin of Desdemona and Cassio. Iago, left alone, hums for an instant quietly, then cries :

" And what's he then that says I play the villain ?  
 When this advice is free I give and honest,  
 Probal to thinking and indeed the course  
 To win the Moor again." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Othello*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See the like cynicism and scepticism in Richard III. Both begin by slandering human nature, and both are misanthropical of *malice prepense*.

<sup>3</sup> *Othello*, ii. 3.

To all these features must be added a diabolical energy,<sup>1</sup> an inexhaustible inventiveness in images, caricatures, obscenity, the manners of a guard-room, the brutal bearing and tastes of a trooper, habits of dissimulation, coolness, hatred, and patience, contracted amid the perils and devices of a military life, and the continuous miseries of long degradation and frustrated hope; you will understand how Shakspeare could transform abstract treachery into a concrete form, and how Iago's atrocious vengeance is only the natural consequence of his character, life, and training.

### VIII.

How much more visible is this impassioned and unfettered genius of Shakspeare in the great characters which sustain the whole weight of the drama! The startling imagination, the furious velocity of the manifold and exuberant ideas, passion let loose, rushing upon death and crime, hallucinations, madness, all the ravages of delirium bursting through will and reason: such are the forces and ravings which engender them. Shall I speak of dazzling Cleopatra, who holds Antony in the whirlwind of her devices and caprices, who fascinates and kills, who scatters to the winds the lives of men as a handful of desert dust, the fatal Eastern sorceress who sports with love and death, impetuous, irresistible, child of air and fire, whose life is but a tempest, whose thought, ever barbed and broken, is like the crackling of a lightning flash? Of Othello, who, beset by the graphic picture of physical adultery, cries at every word of Iago like a man on the rack;

<sup>1</sup> See his conversation with Brabantio, then with Roderigo, Act I.

who, his nerves hardened by twenty years of war and shipwreck, grows mad and swoons for grief, and whose soul, poisoned by jealousy, is distracted and disorganised in convulsions and in stupor? Or of old King Lear, violent and weak, whose half-unseated reason is gradually toppled over under the shocks of incredible treacheries, who presents the frightful spectacle of madness, first increasing, then complete, of curses, howlings, superhuman sorrows, into which the transport of the first access of fury carries him, and then of peaceful incoherence, chattering imbecility, into which the shattered man subsides; a marvellous creation, the supreme effort of pure imagination, a disease of reason, which reason could never have conceived?<sup>1</sup> Amid so many portraitures let us choose two or three to indicate the depth and nature of them all. The critic is lost in Shakspeare, as in an immense town; he will describe a couple of monuments, and entreat the reader to imagine the city.

Plutarch's Coriolanus is an austere, coldly haughty patrician, a general of the army. In Shakspeare's hands he becomes a coarse soldier, a man of the people as to his language and manners, an athlete of war, with a voice like a trumpet; whose eyes by contradiction are filled with a rush of blood and anger, proud and terrible in mood, a lion's soul in the body of a bull. The philosopher Plutarch told of him a lofty philosophic action, saying that he had been at pains to save his landlord in the sack of Corioli. Shakspeare's Coriolanus has indeed the same disposition, for he is really a good fellow; but when Lartius asks him the name

<sup>1</sup> See again, in *Timon*, and *Hotspur* more particularly, perfect examples of vehement and unreasoning imagination.

of this poor Volscian, in order to secure his liberty, he yawns out :

“ By Jupiter ! forgot.  
I am weary ; yea, my memory is tired.  
Have we no wine here ? ”<sup>1</sup>

He is hot, he has been fighting, he must drink ; he leaves his Volscian in chains, and thinks no more of him. He fights like a porter, with shouts and insults, and the cries from that deep chest are heard above the din of the battle like the sounds from a brazen trumpet. He has scaled the walls of Corioli, he has butchered till he is gorged with slaughter. Instantly he turns to the army of Cominius, and arrives red with blood, “ as he were flay’d.” “ Come I too late ? ” Cominius begins to compliment him. “ Come I too late ? ” he repeats. The battle is not yet finished : he embraces Cominius :

“ O ! let me clip ye  
In arms as sound as when I woo’d, in heart  
As merry as when our nuptial day was done.”<sup>2</sup>

For the battle is a real holiday to him. Such senses, such a strong frame, need the outcry, the din of battle, the excitement of death and wounds. This haughty and indomitable heart needs the joy of victory and destruction. Mark the display of his patrician arrogance and his soldier’s bearing, when he is offered the tenth of the spoils :

“ I thank you, general ;  
But cannot make my heart consent to take  
A bribe to pay my sword.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 9.

The soldiers cry, *Marcus ! Marcus !* and the trumpets sound. He gets into a passion : rates the brawlers :

“No more, I say ! For that I have not wash’d  
My nose that bled, or foil’d some debile wretch,—  
. . . You shout me forth  
In acclamations hyperbolical ;  
As if I loved my little should be dieted  
In praises sauced with lies.”<sup>1</sup>

They are reduced to loading him with honours : *Cominius* gives him a war-horse ; decrees him the cognomen of *Coriolanus* : the people shout *Caius Marcus Coriolanus !* He replies :

“I will go wash ;  
And when my face is fair, you shall perceive  
Whether I blush or no : howbeit, I thank you.  
I mean to stride your steed.”<sup>2</sup>

This loud voice, loud laughter, blunt acknowledgment, of a man who can act and shout better than speak, foretell the mode in which he will treat the plebeians. He loads them with insults ; he cannot find abuse enough for the cobblers, tailors, envious cowards, down on their knees for a coin. “To beg of Hob and Dick !” “Bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean.” But he must beg, if he would be consul ; his friends constrain him. It is then that the passionate soul, incapable of self-restraint, such as Shakspeare knew how to paint, breaks forth without hindrance. He is there in his candidate’s gown, gnashing his teeth, and getting up his lesson in this style :

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

"What must I say?

'I pray, sir'—Plague upon't! I cannot bring  
My tongue to such a pace:—'Look, sir, my wounds!  
I got them in my country's service, when  
Some certain of your brethren roar'd and ran  
From the noise of our own drums.'"<sup>1</sup>

The tribunes have no difficulty in stopping the election of a candidate who begs in this fashion. They taunt him in full senate, reproach him with his speech about the corn. He repeats it, with aggravations. Once roused, neither danger nor prayer restrains him:

"His heart's his mouth:

And, being angry, 'does forget that ever  
He heard the name of death.'"<sup>2</sup>

He rails against the people, the tribunes, ediles, flatterers of the plebs. "Come, enough," says his friend Menenius. "Enough, with over-measure," says Brutus the tribune. He retorts:

"No, take more:

What may be sworn by, both divine and human,  
Seal what I end withal! . . . At once pluck out  
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick  
The sweet which is their poison.""<sup>3</sup>

The tribune cries, Treason! and bids seize him. He cries:

"Hence, old goat! . . .

Hence, rotten thing! or I shall shake thy bones  
Out of thy garments!"<sup>4</sup>

He strikes him, drives the mob off: he fancies himself amongst Volscians. "On fair ground I could beat forty of them!" And when his friends hurry him off, he threatens still, and

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, ii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



"Speak(s) o' the people,  
As if you (he) were a god to punish, not  
A man of their infirmity."<sup>1</sup>

Yet he bends before his mother, for he has recognised in her a soul as lofty and a courage as intractable as his own. He has submitted from his infancy to the ascendancy of this pride which he admires. Volumnia reminds him: "My praises made thee first a soldier." Without power over himself, continually tost on the fire of his too hot blood, he has always been the arm, she the thought. He obeys from involuntary respect, like a soldier before his general, but with what effort!

*"Coriolanus. The smiles of knaves  
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up  
The glances of my sight! a beggar's tongue  
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees  
Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his  
That hath received an alms!—I will not do't. . . .  
Volumnia. . . . Do as thou list.  
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,  
But owe thy pride thyself.  
Cor. Pray, be content:  
Mother, I am going to the market-place;  
Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves,  
Cog their hearts from them, and come home beloved  
Of all the trades in Rome."<sup>2</sup>*

He goes, and his friends speak for him. Except a few bitter asides, he appears to be submissive. Then the tribunes pronounce the accusation, and summon him to answer as a traitor:

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.

*Cor.* How ! traitor !

*Men.* Nay, temperately : your promise.

*Cor.* The fires i' the lowest hell fold-in the people !  
Call me their traitor ! Thou injurious tribune !  
Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,  
In thy hands clutch'd as many millions, in  
Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say,  
'Thou liest,' unto thee with a voice as free  
As I do pray the gods."<sup>1</sup>

His friends surround him, entreat him : he will not listen ; he foams at the mouth, he is like a wounded lion :

" Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,  
Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger  
But with a grain a day, I would not buy  
Their mercy at the price of one fair word."<sup>2</sup>

The people vote exile, supporting by their shouts the sentence of the tribune :

*Cor.* You common cry of curs ! whose breath I hate  
As reek o' the rotten fens, whose love I prize  
As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
That do corrupt my air, I banish you. . . . Despising,  
For you, the city, thus I turn my back :  
There is a world elsewhere."<sup>3</sup>

Judge of his hatred by these raging words. It goes on increasing whilst waiting for vengeance. We find him next with the Volscian army before Rome. His friends kneel before him, he lets them kneel. Old Menenius, who had loved him as a son, only comes now to be driven away " Wife, mother, child, I know not."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Coriolanus*, iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* v. 2.

He knows not himself. For this strength of hating in a noble heart is the same as the force of loving. He has transports of tenderness as of rage, and can contain himself no more in joy than in grief. He runs, spite of his resolution, to his wife's arms; he bends his knee before his mother. He had summoned the Volscian chiefs to make them witnesses of his refusals; and before them, he grants all, and weeps. On his return to Corioli, an insulting word from Aufidius maddens him, and drives him upon the daggers of the Volscians. Vices and virtues, glory and misery, greatness and feebleness, the unbridled passion which composes his nature, endowed him with all.

If the life of Coriolanus is the history of a mood, that of Macbeth is the history of a monomania. The witches' prophecy has sunk into his mind at once, like a fixed idea. Gradually this idea corrupts the rest, and transforms the whole man. He is haunted by it; he forgets the thanes who surround him and "who stay upon his leisure;" he already sees in the future an indistinct chaos of images of blood:

. . . "Why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs? . . .  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not."<sup>1</sup>

This is the language of hallucination. Macbeth's hallucination becomes complete when his wife has persuaded him to assassinate the king. He sees in the air a blood-stained dagger, "in form as palpable, as this

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, i. 3.

which now I draw." His whole brain is filled with grand and terrible phantoms, which the mind of a common murderer could never have conceived: the poetry of which indicates a generous heart, enslaved to an idea of fate, and capable of remorse:

. . . "Now o'er the one half world  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,  
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,  
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost. . . . (*A bell rings.*)  
I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.  
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell  
That summons thee to heaven or to hell."<sup>1</sup>

He has done the deed, and returns tottering, haggard, like a drunken man. He is horrified at his bloody hands, "these hangman's hands." Nothing now can cleanse them. The whole ocean might sweep over them, but they would keep the hue of murder. "What hands are here? ha, they pluck out mine eyes!" He is disturbed by a word which the sleeping chamberlains uttered:

"One cried, 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other;  
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.  
Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,'  
When they did say, 'God bless us!' . . .  
But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen!'  
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'  
Stuck in my throat."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 2.

Then comes a strange dream ; a frightful vision of the punishment that awaits him descends upon him.

Above the beating of his heart, the tingling of the blood which seethes in his brain, he had heard them cry :

“ ‘ Sleep no more !

Macbeth does murder sleep,’ the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleave of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.”<sup>1</sup>

And the voice, like an angel’s trumpet, calls him by all his titles :

“ ‘ Glamis hath murder’d sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more ; Macbeth shall sleep no more ! ’ ”<sup>2</sup>

This idea, incessantly repeated, beats in his brain, with monotonous and quick strokes, like the tongue of a bell. Insanity begins ; all the force of his mind is occupied by keeping before him, in spite of himself, the image of the man whom he has murdered in his sleep :

“ To know my deed, ’twere best not know myself.      (*Knock.*)  
Wake Duncan with thy knocking ! I would thou couldst ! ”<sup>3</sup>

Thenceforth, in the rare intervals in which the fever of his mind is assuaged, he is like a man worn out by a long malady. It is the sad prostration of maniacs worn out by their fits of rage :

“ Had I but died an hour before this chance,  
I had lived a blessed time ; for, from this instant  
There’s nothing serious in mortality :

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 3.

All is but toys : renown and grace is dead ;  
 The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees  
 Is left this vault to brag of." <sup>1</sup>

When rest has restored some force to the human machine, the fixed idea shakes him again, and drives him onward, like a pitiless horseman, who has left his panting horse only for a moment, to leap again into the saddle, and spur him over precipices. The more he has done, the more he must do :

" I am in blood  
 Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,  
 Returning were as tedious as go o'er." <sup>2</sup> . . .

He kills in order to preserve the fruit of his murders. The fatal circlet of gold attracts him like a magic jewel ; and he beats down, from a sort of blind instinct, the heads which he sees between the crown and him :

" But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,  
 Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep  
 In the affliction of these terrible dreams  
 That shake us nightly : better be with the dead,  
 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,  
 Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
 In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave ;  
 After life's fitful fever he sleeps well ;  
 Treason has done his worst : nor steel, nor poison,  
 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,  
 Can touch him further." <sup>3</sup>

Macbeth has ordered Banquo to be murdered, and in the midst of a great feast he is informed of the success of his plan. He smiles, and proposes Banquo's

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.

health. Suddenly, conscience-smitten, he sees the ghost of the murdered man; for this phantom, which Shakspeare summons, is not a mere stage-trick: we feel that here the supernatural is unnecessary, and that Macbeth would create it, even if hell would not send it. With muscles twitching, dilated eyes, his mouth half open with deadly terror, he sees it shake its bloody head, and cries with that hoarse voice which is only to be heard in maniacs' cells:

"Prithee, see there! Behold! look! lo! how say you?  
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.  
If charnel-houses and our graves must send  
Those that we bury back, our monuments  
Shall be the maws of kites. . . .  
Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time, . . .  
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd  
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,  
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,  
And there an end; but now they rise again,  
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
And push us from our stools: . . .  
Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!  
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with!"<sup>1</sup>

His body trembling like that of an epileptic, his teeth clenched, foaming at the mouth, he sinks on the ground, his limbs writhe, shaken with convulsive quiverings, whilst a dull sob swells his panting breast, and dies in his swollen throat. What joy can remain for a man beset by such visions? The wide dark country, which he surveys from his towering castle, is but a field of

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, iii. 4.

death, haunted by ominous apparitions; Scotland, which he is depopulating, a cemetery,

"Where . . . the dead man's knell  
Is there scarce ask'd for who; and good men's lives  
Expire before the flowers in their caps,  
Dying or ere they sicken."<sup>1</sup>

His soul is "full of scorpions." He has "supp'd full with horrors," and the loathsome odour of blood has disgusted him with all else. He goes stumbling over the corpses which he has heaped up, with the mechanical and desperate smile of a maniac-murderer. Thenceforth death, life, all is one to him; the habit of murder has placed him out of the pale of humanity. They tell him that his wife is dead:

"Macbeth. She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."<sup>2</sup>

There remains for him the hardening of the heart in crime, the fixed belief in destiny. Hunted down by his enemies, "bear-like, tied to a stake," he fights, troubled only by the prediction of the witches, sure of being invulnerable so long as the man whom they have

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 5.



described, does not appear. Henceforth his thoughts dwell in a supernatural world, and to the last he walks with his eyes fixed on the dream, which has possessed him, from the first.

The history of Hamlet, like that of Macbeth, is a story of moral poisoning. Hamlet has a delicate soul, an impassioned imagination, like that of Shakspeare. He has lived hitherto, occupied in noble studies, skilful in mental and bodily exercises, with a taste for art, loved by the noblest father, enamoured of the purest and most charming girl, confiding, generous, not yet having perceived, from the height of the throne to which he was born, aught but the beauty, happiness, grandeur of nature and humanity.<sup>1</sup> On this soul, which character and training make more sensitive than others, misfortune suddenly falls, extreme, overwhelming, of the very kind to destroy all faith and every motive for action: with one glance he has seen all the vileness of humanity; and this insight is given him in his mother. His mind is yet intact; but judge from the violence of his style, the crudity of his exact details, the terrible tension of the whole nervous machine, whether he has not already one foot on the verge of madness:

“O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature

<sup>1</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*.

Possess it merely. That it should come to this !  
 But two months dead : nay, not so much, not two :  
 So excellent a king, . . . so loving to my mother  
 That he might not let e'en the winds of heaven  
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth !

. . . And yet, within a month,—  
 Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman !—  
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she follow'd my poor father's body, . . .  
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
 She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets !  
 It is not nor it cannot come to good !  
 But break, my heart ; for I must hold my tongue !"<sup>1</sup>

Here already are contortions of thought, a beginning of hallucination, the symptoms of what is to come after. In the middle of conversation the image of his father rises before his mind. He thinks he sees him. How then will it be when the "canonised bones have burst their cerements," "the sepulchre hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws," and when the ghost comes in the night, upon a high "platform" of land, to tell him of the tortures of his prison of fire, and of the fratricide, who has driven him thither ? Hamlet grows faint, but grief strengthens him, and he has a desire for living :

"Hold, hold, my heart ;  
 And you my sinews, grow not instant old,  
 But bear me stiffly up ! Remember thee !  
 Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
 In this distracted globe.—Remember thee !

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, i. 2.

Yea, from the table of my memory  
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, . . .  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live. . . .  
 O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain !  
 My tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain ;  
 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark :  
 So, uncle, there you are.”<sup>1</sup> (*writing.*)

This convulsive outburst, this fevered writing hand, this frenzy of intentness, prelude the approach of a kind of monomania. When his friends come up, he treats them with the speeches of a child or an idiot. He is no longer master of his words ; hollow phrases whirl in his brain, and fall from his mouth as in a dream. They call him ; he answers by imitating the cry of a sportsman whistling to his falcon : “Hillo, ho, ho, boy ! come, bird, come.” Whilst he is in the act of swearing them to secrecy, the ghost below repeats “Swear.” Hamlet cries, with a nervous excitement and a fitful gaiety :

“ Ah ha, boy ! say'st thou so ? art thou there, truepenny ?  
 Come on—you hear this fellow in the cellarage,—  
 Consent to swear. . . .  
*Ghost (beneath).* Swear.  
*Hamlet.* *Hic et ubique ?* then we'll shift our ground.  
 Come hither, gentlemen. . . . Swear by my sword.  
*Ghost (beneath).* Swear.  
*Ham.* Well said, old mole ! canst work i' the earth so fast ?  
 A worthy pioner ! ”<sup>2</sup>

Understand that as he says this his teeth chatter,

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

"pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other." Intense anguish ends with a kind of laughter, which is nothing else than a spasm. Thenceforth Hamlet speaks as though he had a continuous nervous attack. His madness is feigned, I admit; but his mind, as a door whose hinges are twisted, swings and bangs with every wind with a mad haste and with a discordant noise. He has no need to search for the strange ideas, apparent incoherencies, exaggerations, the deluge of sarcasms which he accumulates. He finds them within him; he does himself no violence, he simply gives himself up to himself. When he has the piece played which is to unmask his uncle, he raises himself, lounges on the floor, lays his head in Ophelia's lap; he addresses the actors, and comments on the piece to the spectators; his nerves are strung, his excited thought is like a surging and crackling flame, and cannot find fuel enough in the multitude of objects surrounding it, upon all of which it seizes. When the king rises unmasked and troubled, Hamlet sings, and says, "Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers—if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me—with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir!"<sup>1</sup> And he laughs terribly, for he is resolved on murder. It is clear that this *staté* is a disease, and that the man will not survive it.

In a soul so ardent of thought, and so mighty of feeling, what is left but disgust and despair? We tinge all nature with the colour of our thoughts; we shape the world according to our own ideas; when our soul is sick, we see nothing but sickness in the universe:

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, iii. 2.

"This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust! man delights not me: no, nor woman neither."<sup>1</sup>

Henceforth his thought sullies whatever it touches. He rails bitterly before Ophelia against marriage and love. Beauty! Innocence! Beauty is but a means of prostituting innocence: "Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? . . . What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us."<sup>2</sup>

When he has killed Polonius by accident, he hardly repents it; it is one fool less. He jeers lugubriously:

"*King.* Now Hamlet, where's Polonius?

*Hamlet.* At supper.

*K.* At supper! where?

*H.* Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him."<sup>3</sup>

And he repeats in five or six fashions these gravedigger jests. His thoughts already inhabit a churchyard; to this hopeless philosophy a genuine man is a corpse. Public functions, honours, passions, pleasures, projects, science, all this is but a borrowed mask, which death

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 3.

removes, so that people may see what we are, an evil-smelling and grinning skull. It is this sight he goes to see by Ophelia's grave. He counts the skulls which the gravedigger turns up; this was a lawyer's, that a courtier's. What bows, intrigues, pretensions, arrogance! And here now is a clown knocking it about with his spade, and playing "at loggats with 'em." Caesar and Alexander have turned to clay and make the earth fat; the masters of the world have served to "patch a wall." "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that."<sup>1</sup> When a man has come to this, there is nothing left but to die.

This heated imagination, which explains Hamlet's nervous disease and his moral poisoning, explains also his conduct. If he hesitates to kill his uncle, it is not from horror of blood or from our modern scruples. He belongs to the sixteenth century. On board ship he wrote the order to behead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and to do so without giving them "shriving-time." He killed Polonius, he caused Ophelia's death, and has no great remorse for it. If for once he spared his uncle, it was because he found him praying, and was afraid of sending him to heaven. He thought he was killing him, when he killed Polonius. What his imagination robs him of, is the coolness and strength to go quietly and with premeditation to plunge a sword into a breast. He can only do the thing on a sudden suggestion; he must have a moment of enthusiasm; he must think the king is behind the arras, or else, seeing that he himself is poisoned, he must find his victim under his foil's point. He is not master of his acts;

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, v. 1.

opportunity dictates them; he cannot plan a murder, but must improvise it. A too lively imagination exhausts the will, by the strength of images which it heaps up, and by the fury of intentness which absorbs it. You recognise in him a poet's soul, made not to act, but to dream, which is lost in contemplating the phantoms of its creation, which sees the imaginary world too clearly to play a part in the real world; an artist whom evil chance has made a prince, whom worse chance has made an avenger of crime, and who, destined by nature for genius, is condemned by fortune to madness and unhappiness. Hamlet is Shakspeare, and, at the close of this gallery of portraits which have all some features of his own, Shakspeare has painted himself in the most striking of all.

If Racine or Corneille had framed a psychology, they would have said, with Descartes: Man is an incorporeal soul, served by organs, endowed with reason and will, dwelling in palaces or porticos, made for conversation and society, whose harmonious and ideal action is developed by discourse and replies, in a world constructed by logic beyond the realms of time and place.

If Shakspeare had framed a psychology, he would have said, with Esquirol:<sup>1</sup> Man is a nervous machine, governed by a mood, disposed to hallucinations, carried away by unbridled passions, essentially unreasoning, a mixture of animal and poet, having instead of mind rapture, instead of virtue sensibility, imagination for prompter and guide, and led at random, by the most determinate and complex circumstances, to sorrow, crime, madness, and death.

<sup>1</sup> A French physician (1772-1844), celebrated for his endeavours to improve the treatment of the insane.—Tr.

## IX.

Could such a poet always confine himself to the imitation of nature? Will this poetical world which is going on in his brain, never break loose from the laws of the world of reality? Is he not powerful enough to follow his own laws? He is; and the poetry of Shakspeare naturally finds an outlet in the fantastical. This is the highest grade of unreasoning and creative imagination. Despising ordinary logic, it creates another; it unites facts and ideas in a new order, apparently absurd, in reality regular; it lays open the land of dreams, and its dreams seem to us the truth.

When we enter upon Shakspeare's comedies, and even his half-dramas,<sup>1</sup> it is as though we met him on the threshold, like an actor to whom the prologue is committed, to prevent misunderstanding on the part of the public, and to tell them: "Do not take too seriously what you are about to hear: I am amusing myself. My brain, being full of fancies, desired to array them, and here they are. Palaces, distant landscapes, transparent clouds which blot in the morning the horizon with their grey mists, the red and glorious flames into which the evening sun descends, white cloisters in endless vista through the ambient air, grottos, cottages, the fantastic pageant of all human passions, the irregular sport of unlooked-for adventures,—this is the medley of forms, colours, sentiments, which I let become entangled and confused in my presence, a many-tinted skein of glistening silks, a slender arabesque, whose

<sup>1</sup> *Twelfth Night, As you Like it, Tempest, Winter's Tale, etc., Cymbeline, Merchant of Venice, etc.*



sinuous curves, crossing and mingled, bewilder the mind by the whimsical variety of their infinite complications. Don't regard it as a picture. Don't look for a precise composition, a sole and increasing interest, the skilful management of a well-ordered and congruous plot. I have tales and novels before me which I am cutting up into scenes. Never mind the *finis*, I am amusing myself on the road. It is not the end of the journey which pleases me, but the journey itself. Is there any need in going so straight and quick? Do you only care to know whether the poor merchant of Venice will escape Shylock's knife? Here are two happy lovers, seated under the palace walls on a calm night; wouldn't you like to listen to the peaceful reverie which rises like a perfume from the bottom of their hearts?

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims;  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(*Enter musicians.*)

Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:  
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,  
And draw her home with music.

Jessica. I am never merry when I hear sweet music."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Merchant of Venice*, v. 1.

"Have I not the right, when I see the big laughing face of a clownish servant, to stop near him, see him gesticulate, frolic, gossip, go through his hundred pranks and his hundred grimaces, and treat myself to the comedy of his spirit and gaiety? Two fine gentlemen pass by. I hear the rolling fire of their metaphors, and I follow their skirmish of wit. Here in a corner is the artless arch face of a young wench. Do you forbid me to linger by her, to watch her smiles, her sudden blushes, the childish pout of her rosy lips, the coquetry of her pretty motions? You are in a great hurry if the prattle of this fresh and musical voice can't stop you. Is it no pleasure to view this succession of sentiments and faces? Is your fancy so dull, that you must have the mighty mechanism of a geometrical plot to shake it? My sixteenth century playgoers were easier to move. A sunbeam that had lost its way on an old wall, a foolish song thrown into the middle of a drama, occupied their mind as well as the blackest of catastrophes. After the horrible scene in which Shylock brandished his butcher's knife before Antonio's bare breast, they saw just as willingly the petty household wrangle, and the amusing bit of raillery which ends the piece. Like soft moving water, their soul rose and sank in an instant to the level of the poet's emotion, and their sentiments readily flowed in the bed he had prepared for them. They let him stray here and there on his journey, and did not forbid him to make two voyages at once. They allowed several plots in one. If but the slightest thread united them it was sufficient. Lorenzo eloped with Jessica, Shylock was frustrated in his revenge, Portia's suitors failed in the test imposed upon them; Portia, disguised as a doctor of laws, took from her husband the ring

which he had promised never to part with ; these three or four comedies, disunited, mingled, were shuffled and unfolded together, like an unknotted skein in which threads of a hundred colours are entwined. Together with diversity, my spectators allowed improbability. Comedy is a slight winged creature, which flutters from dream to dream, whose wings you would break if you held it captive in the narrow prison of common sense. Do not press its fictions too hard ; do not probe their contents. Let them float before your eyes like a charming swift dream. Let the fleeting apparition plunge back into the bright misty land from whence it came. For an instant it deluded you ; let it suffice. It is sweet to leave the world of realities behind you ; the mind rests amidst impossibilities. We are happy when delivered from the rough chains of logic, to wander amongst strange adventures, to live in sheer romance, and know that we are living there. I do not try to deceive you, and make you believe in the world where I take you. A man must disbelieve it in order to enjoy it. We must give ourselves up to illusion, and feel that we are giving ourselves up to it. We must smile as we listen. We smile in *The Winter's Tale*, when Hermione descends from her pedestal, and when Leontes discovers his wife in the statue, having believed her to be dead. We smile in *Cymbeline*, when we see the lone cavern in which the young princes have lived like savage hunters. Improbability deprives emotions of their sting. The events interest or touch us without making us suffer. At the very moment when sympathy is too intense, we remind ourselves that it is all a fancy. They become like distant objects, whose distance softens their outline, and wraps them in a luminous veil of blue

air. Your true comedy is an opera. We listen to sentiments without thinking too much of plot. We follow the tender or gay melodies without reflecting that they interrupt the action. We dream elsewhere on hearing music; here I bid you dream on hearing verse."

Then the speaker of the prologue retires, and the actors come on.

*As you Like it* is a caprice,<sup>1</sup> Action there is none; interest barely; likelihood still less. And the whole is charming. Two cousins, princes' daughters, come to a forest with a court clown, Celia disguised as a shepherdess, Rosalind as a boy. They find here the old duke, Rosalind's father, who, driven out of his duchy, lives with his friends like a philosopher and a hunter. They find amorous shepherds, who with songs and prayers pursue intractable shepherdesses. They discover or they meet with lovers who become their husbands. Suddenly it is announced that the wicked Duke Frederick, who had usurped the crown, has just retired to a cloister, and restored the throne to the old exiled duke. Every one gets married, every one dances, everything ends with a "rustic revelry." Where is the pleasantness of these puerilities? First, the fact of its being puerile; the absence of the serious is refreshing. There are no events, and there is no plot. We gently follow the easy current of graceful or melancholy emotions, which takes us away and moves us about without wearying. The place adds to the illusion and charm. It is

<sup>1</sup> In English, a word is wanting to express the French *fantaisie* used by M. Taine, in describing this scene: what in music is called a *capriccio*. Tennyson calls the *Princess* a medley, but it is ambiguous.  
—TR

an autumn forest, in which the sultry rays permeate the blushing oak leaves, or the half-stript ashes tremble and smile to the feeble breath of evening. The lovers wander by brooks that "brawl" under antique roots. As you listen to them, you see the slim birches, whose cloak of lace grows glossy under the slant rays of the sun that gilds them, and the thoughts wander down the mossy vistas in which their footsteps are not heard. What better place could be chosen for the comedy of sentiment and the play of heart-fancies? Is not this a fit spot in which to listen to love-talk? Some one has seen Orlando, Rosalind's lover, in this glade; she hears it and blushes. "Alas the day! . . . What did he, when thou sawest him? What said he? How looked he? Wherein went he? What makes he here? Did he ask for me? Where remains he? How parted he with thee? and when shalt thou see him again?" Then, with a lower voice, somewhat hesitating: "Looks he as freshly as he did the day he wrestled?" She is not yet exhausted: "Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak. Sweet, say on."<sup>1</sup> One question follows another, she closes the mouth of her friend, who is ready to answer. At every word she jests, but agitated, blushing, with a forced gaiety; her bosom heaves, and her heart beats. Nevertheless she is calmer when Orlando comes; bandies words with him; sheltered under her disguise, she makes him confess that he loves Rosalind. Then she plagues him, like the frolic, the wag, the coquette she is. "Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover?" Orlando repeats that he loves Rosalind, and she pleases herself by making him repeat it more

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, iii. 2.

than once. She sparkles with wit, jests, mischievous pranks; pretty fits of anger, feigned sulks, bursts of laughter, deafening babble, engaging caprices. "Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now, an I were your very very Rosalind?" And every now and then she repeats with an arch smile, "And I am your Rosalind; am I not your Rosalind?"<sup>1</sup> Orlando protests that he would die. Die! Who ever thought of dying for love! Leander? He took one bath too many in the Hellespont; so poets have said he died for love. Troilus? A Greek broke his head with a club; so poets have said he died for love. Come, come, Rosalind will be softer. And then she plays at marriage with him, and makes Celia pronounce the solemn words. She irritates and torments her pretended husband; tells him all the whims she means to indulge in, all the pranks she will play, all the teasing he will have to endure. The retorts come one after another like fireworks. At every phrase we follow the looks of these sparkling eyes, the curves of this laughing mouth, the quick movements of this supple figure. It is a bird's petulance and volubility. "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love." Then she provokes her cousin Celia, sports with her hair, calls her by every woman's name. Antitheses without end, words all a-jumble, quibbles, pretty exaggerations, word-racket; as you listen, you fancy it is the warbling of a nightingale. The trill of repeated metaphors, the melodious roll of the poetical gamut, the summer-warbling rustling under the foliage, change the piece into a veritable opera.

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, iv. 1.

The three lovers end by chanting a sort of trio. The first throws out a fancy, the others take it up. Four times this strophe is renewed; and the symmetry of ideas, added to the jingle of the rhymes, makes of a dialogue a concerto of love:

*"Phebe.* Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.

*Silvius.* It is to be all made of sighs and tears;

And so am I for Phebe.

*P.* And I for Ganymede.

*Orlando.* And I for Rosalind.

*Rosalind.* And I for no woman. . . .

*S.* It is to be all made of fantasy,

All made of passion, and all made of wishes,

All adoration, duty, and observance,

All humbleness, all patience and impatience,

All purity, all trial, all observance;

And so I am for Phebe.

*P.* And so am I for Ganymede.

*O.* And so am I for Rosalind.

*R.* And so am I for no woman." <sup>1</sup>

The necessity of singing is so urgent, that a minute later songs break out of themselves. The prose and the conversation end in lyric poetry. We pass straight on into these odes. We do not find ourselves in a new country. We feel the emotion and foolish gaiety as if it were a holiday. We see the graceful couple whom the song of the two pages brings before us, passing in the misty light "o'er the green corn-field," amid the hum of sportive insects, on the finest day of the flowering spring-time. Unlikelihood grows natural, and we are not astonished when we see Hymen

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, v. 2.

leading the two brides by the hand to give them to their husbands.

Whilst the young folks sing, the old folk talk. Their life also is a novel, but a sad one. Shakspeare's delicate soul, bruised by the shocks of social life, took refuge in contemplations of solitary life. To forget the strife and annoyances of the world, he must bury himself in a wide silent forest, and

"Under the shade of melancholy boughs,  
Loose and neglect the creeping hours of time."<sup>1</sup>

We look at the bright images which the sun carves on the white beech-boles, the shade of trembling leaves flickering on the thick moss, the long waves of the summit of the trees; then the sharp sting of care is blunted; we suffer no more, simply remembering that we suffered once; we feel nothing but a gentle misanthropy, and being renewed, we are the better for it. The old duke is happy in his exile. Solitude has given him rest, delivered him from flattery, reconciled him to nature. He pities the stags which he is obliged to hunt for food:

"Come, shall we go and kill us venison?  
And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools,  
Being native burghers of this desert city,  
Should in their own confines with forked heads  
Have their round haunches gored."<sup>2</sup>

Nothing sweeter than this mixture of tender compassion, dreamy philosophy, delicate sadness, poetical complaints, and rustic songs. One of the lords sings:

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 1.



"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,

Thou art not so unkind

As man's ingratitude ;

Thy tooth is not so keen,

Because thou art not seen,

Although thy breath be rude.

Heigh-ho ! sing, heigh-ho ! unto the green holly :

Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly :

Then, heigh-ho, the holly !

This life is most jolly."<sup>1</sup>

Amongst these lords is found a soul that suffers more, Jacques the melancholy, one of Shakspeare's best-loved characters, a transparent mask behind which we perceive the face of the poet. He is sad because he is tender ; he feels the contact of things too keenly, and what leaves others indifferent, makes him weep.<sup>2</sup> He does not scold, he is sad ; he does not reason, he is moved ; he has not the combative spirit of a reforming moralist ; his soul is sick and weary of life. Impassioned imagination leads quickly to disgust. Like opium, it excites and shatters. It leads man to the loftiest philosophy, then lets him down to the whims of a child. Jacques leaves other men abruptly, and goes to the quiet nooks to be alone. He loves his sadness, and would not exchange it for joy. Meeting Orlando, he says :

"Rosalind is your love's name ?

*Orlando.* Yes, just.

*Jacques.* I do not like her name."<sup>3</sup>

He has the fancies of a nervous woman. He is scandalised because Orlando writes sonnets on the forest

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Jacques with the Alceste of Molière. It is the contrast between a misanthrope through reasoning and one through imagination.

<sup>3</sup> *As you Like it*, iii. 2.

trees. He is eccentric, and finds subjects of grief and gaiety, where others would see nothing of the sort :

“ A fool, a fool ! I met a fool i' the forest,  
 A motley fool ; A miserable world !  
 As I do live by food, I met a fool ;  
 Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,  
 And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms,  
 In good set terms and yet a motley fool . .

Jacques hearing him moralise in such a manner begins to laugh “ sans intermission ” that a fool could be so meditative :

O noble fool ; A worthy fool ! Motley's the only wear. . . .  
 O that I were a fool !  
 I am ambitious for a motley coat.”<sup>1</sup>

The next minute he returns to his melancholy dissertations, bright pictures whose vivacity explains his character, and betrays Shakspeare, hiding under his name

“ All the world's a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players :  
 They have their exits and their entrances ;  
 And one man in his time plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
 And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,  
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
 Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
 Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
 Seeking the bubble reputation  
 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances ;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."<sup>1</sup>

*As you Like it* is a half dream. *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a complete one.

The scene, buried in the far-off mist of fabulous antiquity, carries us back to Theseus, Duke of Athens, who is preparing his palace for his marriage with the beautiful queen of the Amazons. The style, loaded with contorted images, fills the mind with strange and splendid visions, and the airy elf-world divert the comedy into the fairy-land from whence it sprung.

Love is still the theme : of all sentiments, is it not the greatest fancy-weaver ? But love is not heard here in the charming prattle of *Rosalind* ; it is glaring, like the season of the year. It does not brim over in slight conversations, in supple and skipping prose ; it breaks forth into big rhyming odes, dressed in magnificent metaphors, sustained by impassioned accents, such as a warm night, odorous and star-spangled, inspires in a poet and a lover. *Lysander* and *Hermia* agree to meet.

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

"*Lysander*. To-morrow night when Phœbe doth behold  
Her silver visage in the watery glass,  
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,  
A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal,  
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

*Hermia*. And in the wood, where often you and I  
Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie. . . .  
There my *Lysander* and myself shall meet." <sup>1</sup>

They get lost, and fall asleep, wearied, under the trees. Puck squeezes in the youth's eyes the juice of a magic flower, and changes his heart. Presently, when he awakes, he will become enamoured of the first woman he sees. Meanwhile Demetrius, *Hermia's* rejected lover, wanders with *Helena*, whom he rejects, in the solitary wood. The magic flower changes him in turn: he now loves *Helena*. The lovers flee and pursue one another, beneath the lofty trees, in the calm night. We smile at their transports, their complaints, their ecstasies, and yet we join in them. This passion is a dream, and yet it moves us. It is like those airy webs which we find at morning on the crest of the hedgerows where the dew has spread them, and whose web sparkles like a jewel-casket. Nothing can be more fragile, and nothing more graceful. The poet sports with emotions; he mingles, confuses, redoubles, interweaves them; he twines and untwines these loves like the mazes of a dance, and we see the noble and tender figures pass by the verdant bushes, beneath the radiant eyes of the stars, now wet with tears, now bright with rapture. They have the abandonment of true love, not the grossness of sensual love. Nothing causes us to fall from the ideal world in which Shak-

<sup>1</sup> *Midsummer Night's Dream*, i. 1.

speare conducts us. Dazzled by beauty, they adore it, and the spectacle of their happiness, their emotion, and their tenderness, is a kind of enchantment.

Above these two couples flutters and hums the swarm of elves and fairies. They also love. Titania, their queen, has a young boy for her favourite, son of an Indian king, of whom Oberon, her husband, wishes to deprive her. They quarrel, so that the elves creep for fear into the acorn cups, in the golden primroses. Oberon, by way of vengeance, touches Titania's sleeping eyes with the magic flower, and thus on waking the nimblest and most charming of the fairies finds herself enamoured of a stupid blockhead with an ass's head. She kneels before him; she sets on his "hairy temples a coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers:"

"And that same dew, which sometime on the buds  
Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls,  
Stood now within the pretty floweret's eyes,  
Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail."<sup>1</sup>

She calls round her all her fairy attendants;

"Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;  
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes;  
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,  
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;  
The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,  
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs  
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,  
To have my love to bed and to arise;  
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies  
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes. . . .  
Come, wait upon him; lead him to my bower.

<sup>1</sup> *Midsommer Night's Dream*, iv. 1.

The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye ;  
 And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,  
 Lamenting some enforced chastity.  
 Tie up my love's tongue, bring him silently."<sup>1</sup>

It was necessary, for her love brayed horribly, and to all the offers of Titania, replied with a petition for hay. What can be sadder and sweeter than this irony of Shakspeare? What raillery against love, and what tenderness for love! The sentiment is divine: its object unworthy. The heart is ravished, the eyes blind. It is a golden butterfly, fluttering in the mud; and Shakspeare, whilst painting its misery, preserves all its beauty:

"Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,  
 While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,  
 And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,  
 And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy. . . .  
 Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms. . . .  
 So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle  
 Gently entwist; the female ivy so  
 Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.  
 O, how I love thee! how I dote on thee!"<sup>2</sup>

At the return of morning, when

"The eastern gate, all fiery red,  
 Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,  
 Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams,"<sup>3</sup>

the enchantment ceases, Titania awakes on her couch of wild thyme and drooping violets. She drives the monster away; her recollections of the night are effaced in a vague twilight:

<sup>1</sup> *Midsummer Night's Dream*, iii. 1.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.

"These things seem small and undistinguishable,  
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds." <sup>1</sup>

And the fairies

"Go seek some dew drops here  
And hang a pearl in every cowalip's ear." <sup>2</sup>

Such is Shakspeare's fantasy, a slight tissue of bold inventions, of ardent passions, melancholy mockery, dazzling poetry, such as one of Titania's elves would have made. Nothing could be more like the poet's mind than these nimble genii, children of air and flame, whose flights "compass the globe" in a second, who glide over the foam of the waves and skip between the atoms of the winds. Ariel flies, an invisible songster, around shipwrecked men to console them, discovers the thoughts of traitors, pursues the savage beast Caliban, spreads gorgeous visions before lovers, and does all in a lightning-flash :

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I :  
In a cowalip's bell I lie. . . .  
Merrily, merrily shall I live now  
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough. . . .  
I drink the air before me, and return  
Or ere your pulse twice beat." <sup>3</sup>

Shakspeare glides over things on as swift a wing, by leaps as sudden, with a touch as delicate.

What a soul ! what extent of action, and what sovereignty of an unique faculty ! what diverse creations, and what persistence of the same impress ! There they all are united, and all marked by the same

<sup>1</sup> *Midsummer Night's Dream*, iv. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Tempest*, v. 1.

sign, void of will and reason, governed by mood, imagination, or pure passion, destitute of the faculties contrary to those of the poet, dominated by the corporeal type which his painter's eyes have conceived, endowed by the habits of mind and by the vehement sensibility which he finds in himself.<sup>1</sup> Go through the groups, and you will only discover in them divers forms and divers states of the same power. Here, a herd of brutes, dotards, and gossips, made up of a mechanical imagination; further on, a company of men of wit, animated by a gay and foolish imagination; then, a charming swarm of women whom their delicate imagination raises so high, and their self-forgetting love carries so far; elsewhere a band of villains, hardened by unbridled passions, inspired by artistic rapture; in the centre a mournful train of grand characters, whose excited brain is filled with sad or criminal visions, and whom an inner destiny urges to murder, madness, or death. Ascend one stage, and contemplate the whole scene: the aggregate bears the same mark as the details. The drama reproduces promiscuously uglinesses, basenesses, horrors, unclean details, profligate and ferocious manners, the whole reality of life just as it is, when it is unrestrained by decorum, common sense, reason, and duty. Comedy, led through a phantasmagoria of pictures, gets lost in the likely and the unlikely, with no other connection but the caprice of an amused imagination, wantonly disjointed and romantic, an opera without music, a concerto of melancholy and tender sentiments, which bears the mind into the supernatural world, and brings before our eyes on its fairy-wings the genius

<sup>1</sup> There is the same law in the organic and in the moral world. It is what Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire calls unity of composition.



which has created it. Look now. Do you not see the poet behind the crowd of his creations? They have heralded his approach. They have all shown somewhat of him. Ready, impetuous, impassioned, delicate, his genius is pure imagination, touched more vividly and by slighter things than ours. Hence his style, blooming with exuberant images, loaded with exaggerated metaphors, whose strangeness is like incoherence, whose wealth is superabundant, the work of a mind, which, at the least incitement, produces too much and takes too wide leaps. Hence this involuntary psychology, and this terrible penetration, which instantaneously perceiving all the effects of a situation, and all the details of a character, concentrates them in every response, and gives to a figure a relief and a colouring which create illusion. Hence our emotion and tenderness. We say to him, as Desdemona to Othello: "I love thee for the battles, sieges, fortunes thou hast passed, and for the distressful stroke that thy youth suffered."

## CHAPTER V.

*The Christian Renaissance.*

## I.

"I WOULD have my reader fully understand," says Luther in the preface to his complete works, "that I have been a monk and a bigoted Papist, so intoxicated, or rather so swallowed up in papistical doctrines, that I was quite ready, if I had been able, to kill or procure the death of those who should have rejected obedience to the Pope by so much as a syllable. I was not all cold or all ice in the Pope's defence, like Eckius and his like, who veritably seemed to me to constitute themselves his defenders rather for their belly's sake than because they looked at the matter seriously. More, to this day they seem to mock at him, like Epicureans. I for my part proceeded frankly, like a man who has horribly feared the day of judgment, and who yet hoped to be saved with a shaking of all his bones." Again, when he saw Rome for the first time, he prostrated himself, saying, "I salute thee, holy Rome . . . bathed in the blood of so many martyrs." Imagine, if you may, the effect which the shameless paganism of the Italian Renaissance had upon such a mind, so loyal, so Christian. The beauty of art, the charm of a refined and sensuous existence, had taken no hold upon him; he judged morals, and he judged them with

his conscience only. He regarded this southern civilisation with the eyes of a man of the north, and understood its vices only, like Ascham, who said he had seen in Venice "more libertie to sinne in ix dayes than ever I heard tell of in our noble Citie of London in ix yeare."<sup>1</sup> Like Arnold and Channing in the present day, like all the men of Germanic<sup>2</sup> race and education, he was horrified at this voluptuous life, now reckless and now licentious, but always void of moral principles, given up to passion, enlivened by irony, caring only for the present, destitute of belief in the infinite, with no other worship than that of visible beauty, no other object than the search after pleasure, no other religion than the terrors of imagination and the idolatry of the eyes.

"I would not," said Luther afterwards, "for a hundred thousand florins have gone without seeing Rome; I should always have doubted whether I was not doing injustice to the Pope. The crimes of Rome are incredible; no one will credit so great a perversity who has not the witness of his eyes, ears, personal knowledge. . . . There reigned all the villanies and infamies, all the atrocious crimes, in particular blind greed, contempt of God, perjuries, sodomy. . . . We Germans swill liquour enough to split us, whilst the Italians are sober. But they are the most impious of men; they make a mock of true religion, they scorn the rest of us Christians, because we believe everything in Scripture. . . . There is a saying in Italy which they make use of when they go to church: 'Come

<sup>1</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), ed. Arber, 1870, first book, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> See, in *Corinne*, Lord Nevil's judgment on the Italians.

and let us conform to the popular error.' 'If we were obliged,' they say again, 'to believe in every word of God, we should be the most wretched of men, and we should never be able to have a moment's cheerfulness; we must put a good face on it, and not believe everything.' This is what Leo X. did, who, hearing a discussion as to the immortality or mortality of the soul, took the latter side. 'For,' said he, 'it would be terrible to believe in a future state. Conscience is an evil beast, who arms man against himself.' . . . The Italians are either epicureans or superstitious. The people fear St. Anthony and St. Sebastian more than Christ, because of the plagues they send. This is why, when they want to prevent the Italians from committing a nuisance anywhere, they paint up St. Anthony with his fiery lance. Thus do they live in extreme superstition, ignorant of God's word, not believing the resurrection of the flesh, nor life everlasting, and fearing only temporal evils. Their blasphemy also is frightful, . . . and the cruelty of their revenge is atrocious. When they cannot get rid of their enemies in any other way, they lay ambush for them in the churches, so that one man cleft his enemy's head before the altar. . . . There are often murders at funerals on account of inheritances. . . . They celebrate the Carnival with extreme impropriety and folly for several weeks, and they have made a custom of various sins and extravagances at it, for they are men without conscience, who live in open sin, and make light of the marriage tie. . . . We Germans, and other simple nations, are like a bare clout; but the Italians are painted and speckled with all sorts of false opinions, and disposed still to embrace many worse. . . . Their fasts are more splen-

did than our most sumptuous feasts. They dress extravagantly; where we spend a florin on our clothes, they put down ten florins to have a silk coat. . . . When they (the Italians) are chaste, it is sodomy with them. There is no society amongst them. No one trusts another; they do not come together freely, like us Germans; they do not allow strangers to speak publicly with their wives: compared with the Germans, they are altogether men of the cloister." These hard words are weak compared with the facts.<sup>1</sup> Treasons, assassinations, tortures, open debauchery, the practice of poisoning, the worst and most shameless outrages, are unblushingly and publicly tolerated in the open light of heaven. In 1490, the Pope's vicar having forbidden clerics and laics to keep concubines, the Pope revoked the decree, "saying that that was not forbidden, because the life of priests and ecclesiastics was such that hardly one was to be found who did not keep a concubine, or at least who had not a courtesan." Caesar Borgia at the capture of Capua "chose forty of the most beautiful women, whom he kept for himself; and a pretty large number of captives were sold at a low price at Rome." Under Alexander VI., "all ecclesiastics, from the greatest to the least, have concubines in the place of wives, and that publicly. If God hinder it not," adds the historian, "this corruption will pass to the monks and religious orders, although, to confess the truth, almost all the monasteries of the town have become bawd-houses, without any one to speak against it." With respect to Alexander VI.,

<sup>1</sup> See *Corpus historicorum mediæ ævi*, G. Eccard, vol. ii.; Joh. Burchardi, high chamberlain to Alexander VI., *Diarium*, p. 2134. Guicciardini, *Dell' istoria d' Italia*, p. 211, ed. Panthéon Littéraire.

who loved his daughter Lucretia, the reader may find in Burchard the description of the marvellous orgies in which he joined with Lucretia and Cæsar, and the enumeration of the prizes which he distributed. Let the reader also read for himself the story of the bestiality of Pietro Luigi Farnese, the Pope's son, how the young and upright Bishop of Fano died from his outrage, and how the Pope, speaking of this crime as "a youthful levity," gave him in this secret bull "the fullest absolution from all the penalties which he might have incurred by human incontinence, in whatever shape or with whatever cause." As to civil security, Bentivoglio caused all the Marescotti to be put to death; Hippolyto d'Este had his brother's eyes put out in his presence; Cæsar Borgia killed his brother; murder is consonant with their public manners, and excites no wonder. A fisherman was asked why he had not informed the governor of the town that he had seen a body thrown into the water; "he replied that he had seen about a hundred bodies thrown into the water during his lifetime in the same place, and that no one had ever troubled himself about it." "In our town," says an old historian, "much murder and pillage was done by day and night, and hardly a day passed but some one was killed." Cæsar Borgia one day killed Peroso, the Pope's favourite, between his arms and under his cloak, so that the blood spurted up to the Pope's face. He caused his sister's husband to be stabbed and then strangled in open day, on the steps of the palace; count, if you can, his assassinations. Certainly he and his father, by their character, morals, complete, open and systematic wickedness, have presented to Europe the two most successful images of the devil. To

sum up in a word, it was on the model of this society, and for this society, that Machiavelli wrote his *Prince*. The complete development of all the faculties and all the lusts of man, the complete destruction of all the restraints and all the shame of man, are the two distinguishing marks of this grand and perverse culture. To make man a strong being, endowed with genius, audacity, presence of mind, astute policy, dissimulation, patience, and to turn all this power to the acquisition of every kind of pleasure, pleasures of the body, of luxury, arts, literature, authority; that is, to form and to set free an admirable and formidable animal, very lustful and well armed,—such was his object; and the effect, after a hundred years, is visible. They tore one another to pieces like beautiful lions and superb panthers. In this society, which was turned into an arena, amid so many hatreds, and when exhaustion was setting in, the foreigner appeared: all bent beneath his lash; they were caged, and thus they pine away, in dull pleasures, with low vices, bowing their backs.<sup>1</sup> Despotism, the Inquisition, the Cicisbei, dense ignorance, and open knavery, the shamelessness and the smartness of harlequins and rascals, misery and vermin,—such is the issue of the Italian Renaissance. Like the old civilisations of Greece and Rome,<sup>2</sup> like the modern civilisations of Provence and Spain, like all southern civilisations, it bears in its bosom an irremediable vice, a bad and false conception of man. The Germans of the sixteenth century, like the Germans of

<sup>1</sup> See, in Casanova's *Mémoires*, the picture of this degradation. See also the *Mémoires* of Scipione Rossi, on the convents of Tuscany at the close of the eighteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> From Homer to Constantine, the ancient city was an association of freemen, whose aim was the conquest and destruction of other freemen.

the fourth century, have rightly judged it; with their simple common sense, with their fundamental honesty, they have put their fingers on the secret plague-spot. A society cannot be founded only on the pursuit of pleasure and power; a society can only be founded on the respect for liberty and justice. In order that the great human renovation which in the sixteenth century raised the whole of Europe might be perfected and endure, it was necessary that, meeting with another race, it should develop another culture, and that from a more wholesome conception of existence it might educe a better form of civilisation.

## II.

Thus, side by side with the Renaissance, was born the Reformation. It also was in fact a new birth, one in harmony with the genius of the Germanic peoples. The distinction between this genius and others is its moral principles. Grosser and heavier, more given to gluttony and drunkenness,<sup>1</sup> these nations are at the same time more under the influence of conscience, firmer in the observance of their word, more disposed to self-denial and sacrifice. Such their climate has made them; and such they have continued, from Tacitus to Luther, from Knox to Gustavus Adolphus and Kant. In the

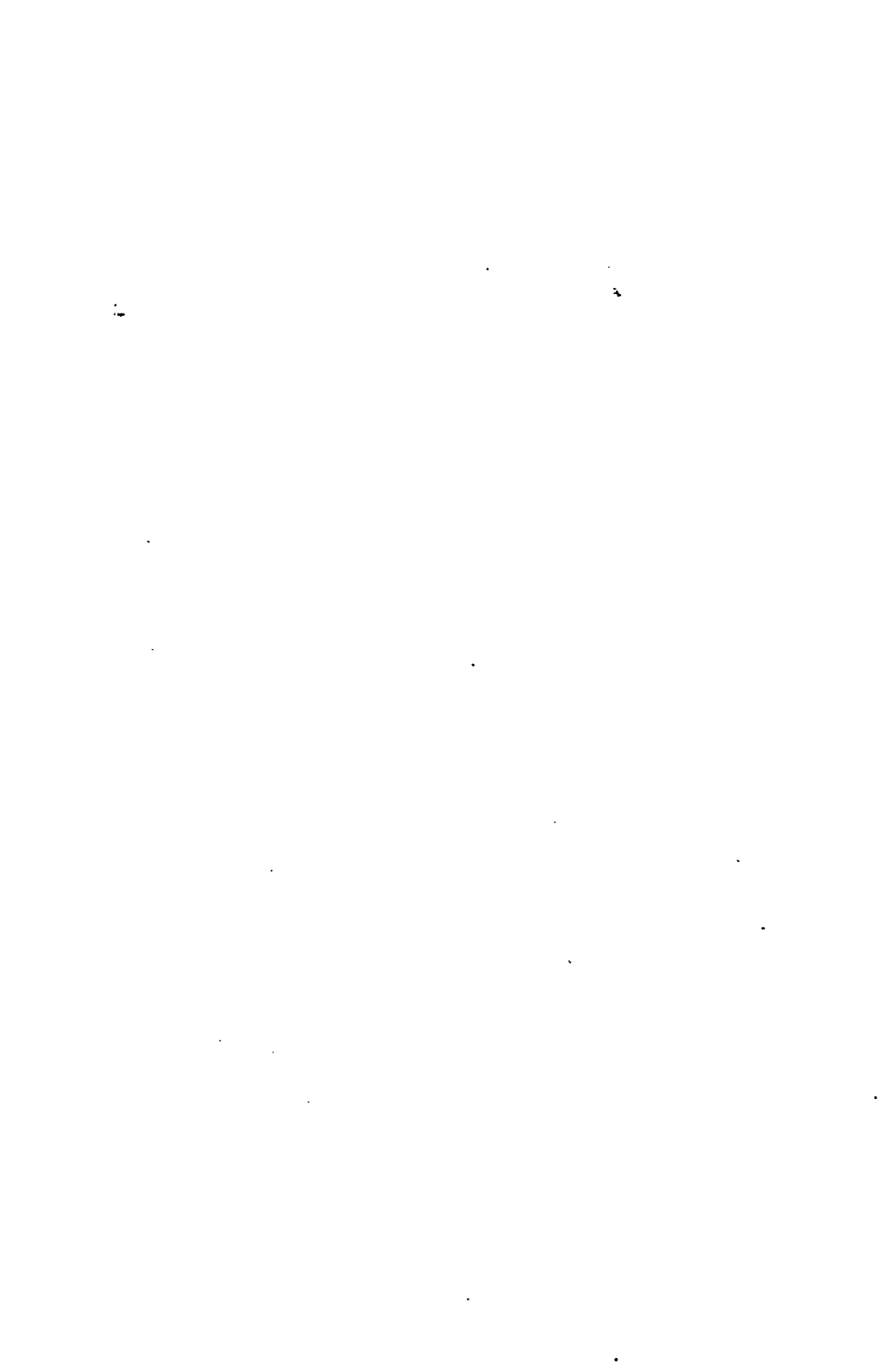
<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de la Margrave de Baireuth*. See also Misson, *Voyage en Italie*, 1700. Compare the manners of the students at the present day. "The Germans are, as you know, wonderful drinkers: no people in the world are more flattering, more civil, more officious; but yet they have terrible customs in the matter of drinking. With them everything is done drinking: they drink in doing everything. There was not time during a visit to say three words, before you were astonished to see the collation arrive, or at least a few jugs of wine, accompanied by a plate of crusts of bread, dished up with pepper and salt; a fatal preparation for bad drinkers. Then you must become acquainted with the





*JOHN KNOX*





course of time, and beneath the incessant action of the ages, the phlegmatic body, fed on coarse food and strong drink, had become rusty, the nerves less excitable, the muscles less strung, the desires less seconded by action, the life more dull and slow, the soul more hardened and indifferent to the shocks of the body : mud, rain, snow, a profusion of unpleasing and gloomy sights, the want of lively and delicate excitements of the senses, keep man in a militant attitude. Heroes in the barbarous ages, workers to-day, they endure weariness now as they courted wounds then ; now, as then, nobility of soul appeals to them ; thrown back upon the enjoyments of the soul, they find in these a world, the world of moral beauty. For them the ideal is displaced ; it is no longer amidst forms, made up of force and joy, but it is transferred to sentiments, made up of truth, uprightness, attachment to duty, observance of order. What matters it if the storm rages and if it snows, if the wind blusters in the black pine-forests or on the wan sea-surges where the sea-gulls scream, if a man, stiff and blue with cold, shutting himself up in his cottage, have but a dish of sourkrout or a piece of salt beef, under his smoky light and beside his fire of turf ; another kingdom opens to reward him, the kingdom of inward contentment : his wife loves him and is faithful ; his children round his hearth spell out the old family

laws which are afterwards observed, sacred and inviolable laws. You must never drink without drinking to some one's health ; also, after drinking, you must offer the wine to him whose health you have drunk. You must never refuse the glass which is offered to you, and you must naturally drain it to its last drop. Reflect a little, I beseech you, on these customs, and see how it is possible to cease drinking ; accordingly, they never cease. In Germany it is a perpetual drinking-bout ; to drink in Germany is to drink for ever."

Bible; he is the master in his home, the protector, the benefactor, honoured by others, honoured by himself; and if so be that he needs assistance, he knows that at the first appeal he will see his neighbours stand faithfully and bravely by his side. The reader need only compare the portraits of the time, those of Italy and Germany; he will comprehend at a glance the two races and the two civilisations, the Renaissance and the Reformation: on one side a half-naked condottiere in Roman costume, a cardinal in his robes, amply draped, in a rich arm-chair, carved and adorned with heads of lions, foliage, dancing fauns, he himself full of irony, and voluptuous, with the shrewd and dangerous look of a politician and man of the world, craftily poised and on his guard; on the other side, some honest doctor, a theologian, a simple man, with badly combed locks, stiff as a post, in his simple gown of coarse black serge, with big books of dogma ponderously clasped, a conscientious worker, an exemplary father of a family. See now the great artist of the age, a laborious and conscientious workman, a follower of Luther's, a true Northman—Albert Durer.<sup>1</sup> He also, like Raphael and Titian, has his ideal of man, an inexhaustible ideal, whence spring by hundreds living figures and the representations of manners, but how national and original! He cares not for expansive and happy beauty: to him nude bodies are but bodies undressed: narrow shoulders, prominent stomachs, thin legs, feet weighed down by shoes, his neighbour the carpenter's, or his gossip the sausage-seller's. The heads stand out in his etchings, remorselessly scraped and scooped away, savage or commonplace, often wrinkled by the fatigues of trade,

<sup>1</sup> See his letters, and the sympathy expressed for Luther.

generally sad, anxious, and patient, harshly and wretchedly transformed by the necessities of realistic life. Where is the vista out of this minute copy of ugly truth? To what land will the lofty and melancholy imagination betake itself? The land of dreams, strange dreams swarming with deep thoughts, sad contemplation of human destiny, a vague notion of the great enigma, groping reflection, which in the dimness of the rough woodcuts, amidst obscure emblems and fantastic figures, tries to seize upon truth and justice. There was no need to search so far; Durer had grasped them at the first effort. If there is any decency in the world, it is in the Madonnas which are constantly springing to life under his pencil. He did not begin, like Raphael, by making them nude; the most licentious hand would not venture to disturb one stiff fold of their robes; with an infant in their arms, they think but of him, and will never think of anybody else but him; not only are they innocent, but they are virtuous. The good German housewife, for ever shut up, voluntarily and naturally, within her domestic duties and contentment, breathes out in all the fundamental sincerity, the seriousness, the unassailable loyalty of their attitudes and looks. He has done more; with this peaceful virtue he has painted a militant virtue. There at last is the genuine Christ, the man crucified, lean and fleshless through his agony, whose blood trickles minute by minute, in rarer drops, as the feebler and feebler pulsations give warning of the last throes of a dying life. We do not find here, as in the Italian masters a sight to charm the eyes, a mere flow of drapery, a disposition of groups. The heart, the very heart is wounded by this sight: it is the just man oppressed, who is dying because the world hates

justice. The mighty, the men of the age, are there, indifferent, full of irony : a plumed knight, a big-bellied burgomaster, who, with hands folded behind his back, looks on, kills an hour. But the rest weep ; above the fainting women, angels full of anguish catch in their vessels the holy blood as it trickles down, and the stars of heaven veil their face not to behold so tremendous an outrage. Other outrages will also be represented ; tortures manifold, and the true martyrs beside the true Christ, resigned, silent, with the sweet expression of the earliest believers. They are bound to an old tree, and the executioner tears them with his iron pointed lash. A bishop with clasped hands is praying, lying down, whilst an auger is being screwed into his eye. Above amid the interlacing trees and gnarled roots, a band of men and women, climb under the lash the breast of a hill, and they are hurled from the crest at the lance's point into the abyss ; here and there roll heads, lifeless bodies ; and by the side of those who are being decapitated, the swollen corpses, impaled, await the croaking ravens. All these sufferings must be undergone for the confession of faith and the establishment of justice. But above there is a guardian, an avenger, an all-powerful Judge, whose day shall come. This day has come, and the piercing rays of the last sun already flash, like a handful of darts, across the darkness of the age. High up in the heavens appears the angel in his shining robe, leading the ungovernable horsemen, the flashing swords, the inevitable arrows of the avengers, who are to trample upon and punish the earth ; mankind falls down beneath their charge, and already the jaw of the infernal monster grinds the head of the wicked prelates. This is the popular poem of conscience, and from the



days of the apostles, man has not had a more sublime and complete conception.<sup>1</sup>

For conscience, like other things, has its poem; by a natural invasion the all-powerful idea of justice overflows from the soul, covers heaven, and enthrones there a new deity. A formidable deity, who is scarcely like the calm intelligence which serves philosophers to explain the order of things; nor to that tolerant deity, a kind of constitutional king, whom Voltaire discovered at the end of a chain of argument, whom Béranger sings of as of a comrade, and whom he salutes "sans lui demander rien." It is the just Judge, sinless and stern, who demands of man a strict account of his visible actions and of all his invisible feelings, who tolerates no forgetfulness, no dejection, no failing, before whom every approach to weakness or error is an outrage and a treason. What is our justice before this strict justice? People lived in peace in the times of ignorance; at most, when they felt themselves guilty, they went for absolution to a priest; all was ended by their buying a big indulgence; there was a tariff, as there still is; Tetzl the Dominican declares that all sins are blotted out "as soon as the money chinks in the box." Whatever be the crime, there is a quit-tance; even "*si Dei matrem violavisset*," he might go home clean and sure of heaven. Unfortunately the vendors of pardons did not know that all was changed, and that the intellect was become manly, no longer gabbling words mechanically like a catechism, but probing them anxiously like a truth. In the universal Renaissance, and in the mighty growth of all human ideas,

<sup>1</sup> See a collection of Albert Durer's wood-carvings. Remark the resemblance of his *Apocalypse* to Luther's *Table Talk*.

the German idea of duty blooms like the rest. Now, when we speak of justice, it is no longer a lifeless phrase which we repeat, but a living idea which we produce; man sees the object which it represents, and feels the emotion which summons it up; he no longer receives, but he creates it; it is his work and his tyrant; he makes it, and submits to it. "These words *justus* and *justitia Dei*," says Luther, "were a thunder to my conscience. I shuddered to hear them; I told myself, if God is just, He will punish me."<sup>1</sup> For as soon as the conscience discovers again the idea of the perfect model,<sup>2</sup> the smallest failings appeared to be crimes, and man, condemned by his own scruples, fell prostrate, and, "as it were, swallowed up" with horror. "I, who lived the life of a spotless monk," says Luther, "yet felt within me the troubled conscience of a sinner, without managing to assure myself as to the satisfaction

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, the logician of the Reformation, well explains the dependence of all the Protestant ideas in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, i. (1.) The idea of the perfect God, the stern Judge. (2.) The alarm of conscience. (3.) The impotence and corruption of nature. (4.) The advent of free grace. (5.) The rejection of rites and ceremonies.

<sup>2</sup> "In the measure in which pride is rooted within us, it always appears to us as though we were just and whole, good and holy; unless we are convinced by manifest arguments of our injustice, uncleanness, folly, and impurity. For we are not convinced of it if we turn our eyes to our own persons merely, and if we do not think also of God, who is the only rule by which we must shape and regulate this judgment. . . . And then that which had a fair appearance of virtue will be found to be nothing but weakness.

"This is the source of that horror and wonder by which the Scriptures tell us the saints were afflicted and cast down, when and as often as they felt the presence of God. For we see those who were as it might be far from God, and who were confident and went about with head erect, as soon as He displayed His glory to them, they were shaken and terrified, so much so that they were overwhelmed, nay swallowed up in the horror of death, and that they fainted away."—*Calvin's Institutes*, i.

which I owed to God . . . Then I said to myself: Am I then the only one who ought to be sad in my spirit? . . . Oh, what horrible spectres and figures I used to see!" Thus alarmed, conscience believes that the terrible day is at hand. "The end of the world is near. . . . Our children will see it; perchance we ourselves." Once in this mood he had terrible dreams for six months at a time. Like the Christians of the Apocalypse he fixes the moment when the world will be destroyed: it will come at Easter, or at the conversion of Saint Paul. One theologian, his friend, thought of giving all his goods to the poor; "but would they receive it?" he said. "To-morrow night we shall be seated in heaven." Under such anguish the body gives way. For fourteen days Luther was in such a condition, that he could neither drink, eat, nor sleep. "Day and night," his eyes fixed on a text of Saint Paul, he saw the Judge, and His inevitable hand. Such is the tragedy which is enacted in all Protestant souls—the eternal tragedy of conscience; and its issue is a new religion.

For nature alone and unassisted cannot rise from this abyss. "By itself it is so corrupted, that it does not feel the desire for heavenly things. . . . There is in it before God nothing but lust." Good intentions cannot spring from it. "For, terrified by the vision of his sin, man could not resolve to do good, troubled and anxious as he is; on the contrary, dejected and crushed by the weight of his sin, he falls into despair and hatred of God, as it was with Cain, Saul, Judas;" so that, abandoned to himself, he can find nothing within him but the rage and the dejection of a despairing wretch or a devil. In vain he might try to redeem

himself by good works : our good deeds are not pure ; even though pure, they do not wipe out the stain of previous sins, and moreover they do not take away the original corruption of the heart ; they are only boughs and blossoms, the inherited poison is in the sap. Man must descend to the heart, underneath literal obedience and legal rule ; from the kingdom of law he must penetrate into that of grace ; from forced righteousness to spontaneous generosity ; beneath his original nature, which led him to selfishness and earthly things, a second nature must be developed, leading him to sacrifice and heavenly things. Neither my works, nor my justice, nor the works or justice of any creature or of all creatures, could work in me this wonderful change. One alone can do it, the pure God, the Just Victim, the Saviour, the Redeemer, Jesus, my Christ, by imputing to me His justice, by pouring upon me His merits, by drowning my sin under His sacrifice. The world is a "mass of perdition,"<sup>1</sup> predestined to hell. Lord Jesus, draw me back, select me from this mass. I have no claim to it ; there is nothing in me that is not abominable ; this very prayer is inspired and formed within me by Thee. But I weep, and my breast heaves, and my heart is broken. Lord, let me feel myself redeemed, pardoned, Thy elect one, Thy faithful one ; give me grace, and give me faith ! "Then," says Luther, "I felt myself born anew, and it seemed that I was entering the open gates of heaven."

What remains to be done after this renovation of the heart ? Nothing : all religion is in that : the rest must be reduced or suppressed ; it is a personal affair, an inward dialogue between God and man, where there are

<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine.

only two things at work,—the very word of God as it is transmitted by Scripture, and the emotions of the heart of man, as the word of God excites and maintains them.<sup>1</sup> Let us do away with the rites that appeal to the senses, wherewith men wished to replace this intercourse between the invisible soul and the visible judge,—mortifications, fasts, corporeal penance, Lent, vows of chastity and poverty, rosaries, indulgences; rites serve only to smother living piety underneath mechanical works. Away with the mediators by which men have attempted to impede the direct intercourse between God and man,—namely, saints, the Virgin, the Pope, the priest; whosoever adores or obeys them is an idolater. Neither saints nor Virgin can convert or save us; God alone by His Christ can convert and save. Neither Pope nor priest can fix our faith or forgive our sins; God alone instructs us by His word, and absolves us by His pardon. No more pilgrimages or relics; no more traditions or auricular confessions. A new church appears, and therewith a new worship; ministers of religion change their tone, the worship of God its form; the authority of the clergy is diminished, and the pomp of services is reduced: they are reduced and diminished the more, because the primitive idea of the new

<sup>1</sup> Melancthon, preface to *Luther's Works*: "It is clear that the works of Thomas, Scotus, and the like, are utterly silent about the element of justification by faith, and contain many errors concerning the most important questions relating to the church. It is clear that the discourses of the monks in their churches almost throughout the world were either fables about purgatory and the saints or else some kind of dogma of law or discipline, without a word of the gospel concerning Christ, or else were vain trifles about distinctions in the matter of food, about feasts, and other human traditions. . . . The gospel is pure, incorruptible, and not diluted with Gentile opinions." See also Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, 8 vols., ed. Townsend, 1843, ii. 42.

theology is more absorbing ; so much so, that in certain sects they have disappeared altogether. The priest descends from the lofty position in which the right of forgiving sins and of regulating faith had raised him over the heads of the laity ; he returns to civil society, marries like the rest, aims to be once more an equal, is merely a more learned and pious man than others, chosen by themselves and their adviser. The church becomes a temple, void of images, decorations, ceremonies sometimes altogether bare ; a simple meeting-house, where, between whitewashed walls, from a plain pulpit, a man in a black gown speaks without gesticulations, reads a passage from the Bible, begins a hymn, which the congregation takes up. There is another place of prayer, as little adorned and not less venerated, the domestic hearth, where every night the father of the family, before his servants and his children, prays aloud and reads the Scriptures. An austere and free religion, purged from sensualism and obedience, inward and personal, which, set on foot by the awakening of the conscience, could only be established among races in which each man found within his nature the conviction that he alone is responsible for his actions, and always bound to the observance of his duty.

### III.

It must be admitted that the Reformation entered England by a side door ; but it is enough that it came in, whatever the manner : for great revolutions are not introduced by court intrigues and official cleverness, but by social conditions and popular instincts. When five millions of men are converted, it is because five millions







*ARCHBISHOP CRANMER*



of men wish to be converted. Let us therefore leave on one side the intrigues in high places, the scruples and passions of Henry VIII.,<sup>1</sup> the pliability and plausibility of Cranmer, the vacillations and basenesses of Parliament, the oscillation and tardiness of the Reformation, begun, then arrested, then pushed forward, then suddenly, violently pushed back, then spread over the whole nation, and hedged in by a legal establishment, built up from discordant materials, but yet solid and durable. Every great change has its root in the soul, and we have only to look close into this deep soil to discover the national inclinations and the secular irritations from which Protestantism has issued.

A hundred and fifty years before, it had been on the point of bursting forth; Wycliff had appeared, the Lollards had sprung up, the Bible had been translated; the Commons had proposed the confiscation of all ecclesiastical property; then under the pressure of the Church, royalty and aristocracy combined, the growing Reformation being crushed, disappeared underground, only to reappear at distant intervals by the sufferings of its martyrs. The bishops had received the right of imprisoning without trial laymen suspected of heresy; they had burned Lord Cobham alive; the kings chose their ministers from the episcopal bench; settled in authority and pomp, they had made the nobility and people bend under the secular sword which had been entrusted to them, and in their hands the stern network of law, which from the Conquest had compressed the nation in its iron meshes, had become still more stringent and more offensive. Venial acts had been construed into crimes, and the

<sup>1</sup> See Froude, *History of England*, i.-vi. The conduct of Henry VIII. is there presented in a new light.

judicial repression, extended to sins as well as to crimes, had changed the police into an inquisition. " 'Offences against chastity,' 'heresy,' or 'matter sounding thereunto,' 'witchcraft,' 'drunkenness,' 'scandal,' 'defamation,' 'impatient words,' 'broken promises,' 'untruth,' 'absence from church,' 'speaking evil of saints,' 'nonpayment of offerings,' 'complaints against the constitutions of the courts themselves;'"<sup>1</sup> all these transgressions, imputed or suspected, brought folk before the ecclesiastical tribunals, at enormous expense, with long delays, from great distances, under a captious procedure, resulting in heavy fines, strict imprisonments, humiliating abjurations, public penances, and the menace, often fulfilled, of torture and the stake. Judge from a single fact; the Earl of Surrey, a relative of the king, was accused before one of these tribunals of having neglected a fast. Imagine, if you can, the minute and incessant oppressiveness of such a code; how far the whole of human life, visible actions and invisible thoughts, was surrounded and held down by it; how by enforced accusations it penetrated to every hearth and into every conscience; with what shamelessness it was transformed into a vehicle for extortions; what secret anger it excited in these townsfolk, these peasants, obliged sometimes to travel sixty miles and back to leave in one or other of the numberless talons of the law<sup>2</sup> a part of their savings, sometimes their whole substance and that of their children. A man begins to think when he is thus down-trodden; he asks himself quietly if it is really by divine dispensation that mitred

<sup>1</sup> Froude, i. 191. *Petition of Commons*. This public and authentic protest shows up all the details of clerical organisation and oppression.

<sup>2</sup> Froude, i. 26; ii. 192.

thieves thus practise tyranny and pillage; he looks more closely into their lives; he wants to know if they themselves practise the regularity which they impose on others; and on a sudden he learns strange things. Cardinal Wolsey writes to the Pope, that "both the secular and regular priests were in the habit of committing atrocious crimes, for which, if not in orders, they would have been promptly executed;<sup>1</sup> and the laity were scandalised to see such persons not only not degraded, but escaping with complete impunity." A priest convicted of incest with the prioress of Kilbourn was simply condemned to carry a cross in a procession, and to pay three shillings and fourpence; at which rate, I fancy, he would renew the practice. In the preceding reign (Henry VII.) the gentlemen and farmers of Carnarvonshire had laid a complaint accusing the clergy of systematically seducing their wives and daughters. There were brothels in London for the especial use of priests. As to the abuse of the confessional, read in the original the familiarities to which it opened the door.<sup>2</sup> The bishops gave livings to their children whilst they were still young. The holy Father Prior of Maiden Bradley hath but six children, and but one daughter married yet of the goods of the monastery; trusting shortly to marry the rest. In the convents the monks used to drink after supper till ten or twelve next morning, and came to matins drunk. They played cards or dice. Some came to service in the afternoons, and only then for fear of corporal punishments. The royal "visitors" found concubines in the secret apart-

<sup>1</sup> In May 1528. Froude, i. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Hale, *Criminal Causes. Suppression of the Monasteries*, Camden Soc. Publications. Froude, i. 194-201.

ments of the abbots. At the nunnery of Sion, the confessors seduced the nuns and absolved them at the same time. There were convents, Burnet tells us, where all the recluses were found pregnant. About "two-thirds" of the English monks lived in such sort, that "when their enormities were first read in the Parliament House, there was nothing but 'down with them!'"<sup>1</sup> What a spectacle for a nation in whom reason and conscience were awakening! Long before the great outburst, public wrath muttered ominously, and was accumulating for a revolt; priests were yelled at in the streets or "thrown into the kennel;" women would not "receive the sacrament from hands which they thought polluted."<sup>2</sup> When the apparitor of the ecclesiastical courts came to serve a process, he was driven away with insults. "Go thy way thou stynkyng knave, ye are but knaves and brybours everych one of you." A mercer broke an apparitor's head with his yard. "A waiter at the sign of the Cock" said "that the sight of a priest did make him sick, and that he would go sixty miles to indict a priest." Bishop Fitz-James wrote to Wolsey, that the juries in London were "so maliciously set *in favorem hæreticæ pravitatis*, that they will cast and condemn any clerk, though he were as innocent as Abel."<sup>3</sup> Wolsey himself spoke to the Pope of the "dangerous spirit" which was spread abroad among the people, and planned a Reformation. When Henry VIII. laid the axe to the tree, and slowly, with mistrust, struck a blow, then a second lopping off the branches, there were a

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Sermons*.

<sup>2</sup> They called them "*horeyn prestes*," "*horeyn*," or "*whorson knaves*." Hale, p. 99; quoted by Froude, i. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Froude, i. 101 (1514).

thousand, nay, a hundred thousand hearts which approved of it, and would themselves have struck the trunk.

Consider the internal state of a diocese, that of Lincoln for instance,<sup>1</sup> at this period, about 1521, and judge by this example of the manner in which the ecclesiastical machinery works throughout the whole of England, multiplying martyrs, hatreds, and conversions. Bishop Longland summons the relatives of the accused, brothers, women and children, and administers the oath; as they have already been prosecuted and have abjured, they must make oath, or they are relapsed, and the fagots await them. Then they denounce their kinsman and themselves. One has taught the other in English the Epistle of Saint James. This man, having forgotten several words of the *Pater* and *Credo* in Latin, can only repeat them in English. A woman turned her face from the cross which was carried about on Easter morning. Several at church, especially at the moment of the elevation, would not say their prayers, and remained seated "dumb as beasts." Three men, including a carpenter, passed a night together reading a book of the Scriptures. A pregnant woman went to mass not fasting. A brazier denied the Real Presence. A brick-maker kept the Apocalypse in his possession. A thresher said, as he pointed to his work, that he was going to make God come out of his straw. Others spoke lightly of pilgrimage, or of the Pope, or of relics, or of confession. And then fifty of them were condemned the same year to abjure, to promise to denounce each other, and to do penance all their lives, on pain of being burnt, as relapsed heretics. They were shut

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, iv. 221.

up in different "monasteries;" there they were to be maintained by alms, and to work for their support; they were to appear with a fagot on their shoulders at market, and in the procession on Sunday. Then in a general procession, then at the punishment of a heretic; "they were to fast on bread and ale only every Friday during their life, and every even of Corpus Christy on bread and water, and carry a visible mark on their cheek." Beyond that, six were burnt alive, and the children of one, John Scrivener, were obliged themselves to set fire to their father's wood pile. Do you think that a man, burnt or shut up, was altogether done with? He is silenced, I admit, or he is hidden; but long memories and bitter resentments endure under a forced silence. People saw<sup>1</sup> their companion, relation, brother, bound by an iron chain, with clasped hands, praying amid the smoke, whilst the flame blackened his skin and destroyed his flesh. Such sights are not forgotten; the last words uttered on the fagot, the last appeals to God and Christ, remain in their hearts all-powerful and ineffaceable. They carry them about with them, and silently ponder over them in the fields, at their labour, when they think themselves alone; and then, darkly, passionately, their brains work. For, beyond this universal sympathy which gathers mankind about the oppressed, there is the working of the religious sentiment. The crisis of conscience has begun which is natural to this race; they meditate on their salvation, they are alarmed at their condition: terrified at the judgments of God, they ask themselves whether, living

<sup>1</sup> See, *passim*, the prints of Fox. All the details which follow are from biographies. See those of Cromwell, by Carlyle, of Fox the Quaker, of Bunyan, and the trials reported at length by Fox.



under imposed obedience and ceremonies, they do not become culpable, and merit damnation. Can this terror be stifled by prisons and torture? Fear against fear, the only question is, which is the strongest! They will soon know it: for the peculiarity of these inward anxieties is that they grow beneath constraint and oppression; as a welling spring which we vainly try to stamp out under stones, they bubble and leap up and swell, until their surplus overflows, disjoining or bursting asunder the regular masonry under which men endeavoured to bury them. In the solitude of the fields, or during the long winter nights, men dream; soon they fear, and become gloomy. On Sunday at church, obliged to cross themselves, to kneel before the cross, to receive the host, they shudder, and think it a mortal sin. They cease to talk to their friends, remain for hours with bowed heads, sorrowful; at night their wives hear them sigh; unable to sleep they rise from their beds. Picture such a wan face, full of anguish, nourishing under its sternness and calmness a secret ardour: it is still to be found in England in the poor shabby dissenter, who, Bible in hand, stands up suddenly to preach at a street corner; in those long-faced men who, after the service, not having had enough of prayers, sing a hymn in the street. The sombre imagination has started, like a woman in labour, and its conception swells day by day, tearing him who contains it. Through the long muddy winter, the howling of the wind sighing among the ill-fitting rafters, the melancholy of the sky, continually flooded with rain or covered with clouds, add to the gloom of the lugubrious dream. Thenceforth man has made up his mind; he will be saved at all costs. At the peril of his life, he obtains one of the books which teach the way of salvation,

Wycliff's *Wicket Gate*, *The Obedience of a Christian*, or sometimes Luther's *Revelation of Antichrist*, but above all some portion of the word of God, which Tyndale had just translated. One man hid his books in a hollow tree; another learned by heart an epistle or a gospel, so as to be able to ponder it to himself even in the presence of his accusers. When sure of his neighbour, he speaks with him in private; and peasant talking to peasant, labourer to labourer—you know what the effect will be. It was the yeomen's sons, as Latimer said, who more than all others maintained the faith of Christ in England;<sup>1</sup> and it was with the yeomen's sons that Cromwell afterwards reaped his Puritan victories. When such words are whispered through a nation, all official voices clamour in vain: the nation has found its poem, it stops its ears to the troublesome would-be distractors, and presently sings it out with a full voice and from a full heart.

But the contagion had even reached the men in office, and Henry VIII. at last permitted the English Bible to be published.<sup>2</sup> England had her book. Every one, says Strype, who could buy this book either read it assiduously, or had it read to him by others, and many well advanced in years learned to read with the same object. On Sunday the poor folk gathered at the bottom of the churches to hear it read. Maldon, a young man, afterwards related that he had clubbed his savings with an apprentice to buy a New Testament, and that for fear of his father, they had hidden it in their straw mattress. In vain the king in his pro-

<sup>1</sup> Froude, ii. 33: "The bishops said in 1529, 'In the crime of heresy thanked be God, there hath no notable person fallen in our time.'"

<sup>2</sup> In 1536. Strype's *Memorials*, appendix. Froude, iii. ch. 12.

clamation had ordered people not to rest too much upon their own sense, ideas, or opinions; not to reason publicly about it in the public taverns and alehouses, but to have recourse to learned and authorised men; the seed sprouted, and they chose rather to take God's word in the matter than men's. Maldon declared to his mother that he would not kneel to the crucifix any longer, and his father in a rage beat him severely, and was ready to hang him. The preface itself invited men to independent study, saying that "the Bishop of Rome has studied long to keep the Bible from the people, and specially from princes, lest they should find out his tricks and his falsehoods; . . . knowing well enough, that if the clear sun of God's word came over the heat of the day, it would drive away the foul mist of his devilish doctrines."<sup>1</sup> Even on the admission, then, of official voices, they had there the pure and the whole truth, not merely speculative but moral truth, without which we cannot live worthily or be saved. Tyndale, the translator, says:

"The right waye (yea and the onely waye) to understand the Scripture unto salvation, is that we earnestlye and above all thynges serche for the profession of our baptisme or covenantes made betwene God and us. As for an example. Christe sayth, Mat. v., Happy are the mercifull, for they shall obtayne mercye. Lo, here God hath made a covenaut wyth us, to be mercifull unto us, yf we wyll be mercifull one to another."

What an expression! and with what ardour men pricked by the ceaseless reproaches of a scrupulous conscience, and the presentiment of the dark future, will devote on these pages the whole attention of eyes and heart!

<sup>1</sup> Coverdale. Froude, iii. 81.

I have before me one of these great old folios,<sup>1</sup> in black letter, in which the pages, worn by horny fingers have been patched together, in which an old engraving figures forth to the poor folk the deeds and menaces of the God of Israel, in which the preface and table of contents point out to simple people the moral which is to be drawn from each tragic history, and the application which is to be made of each venerable precept. Hence have sprung much of the English language, and half of the English manners; to this day the country is biblical;<sup>2</sup> it was these big books which had transformed Shakspeare's England. To understand this great change, try to picture these yeomen, these shopkeepers, who in the evening placed this Bible on their table, and bare-headed, with veneration, heard or read one of its chapters. Think that they have no other books, that theirs was a virgin mind, that every impression would make a furrow, that the monotony of mechanical existence rendered them entirely open to new emotions, that they opened this book not for amusement, but to discover in it their doom of life and death; in brief, that the sombre and impassioned imagination of the race raised them to the level of the grandeurs and terrors which were to pass before their eyes. Tyndale, the translator, wrote with such sentiments, condemned, hunted, in concealment, his mind full of the idea of a speedy death, and of the great God for whom at last he mounted the funeral pyre; and the spectators who had seen the remorse of *Macbeth*<sup>3</sup> and the murders of

<sup>1</sup> 1549. Tyndale's translation.

<sup>2</sup> An expression of Stendhal's; it was his general impression.

<sup>3</sup> The time of which M. Taine speaks, and the translation of Tyndale precede by at least fifty years the appearance of *Macbeth* (1606). Shakspeare's audience read the present authorised translation.—THE.

Shakspeare can listen to the despair of David, and the massacres accumulated in the books of Judges and Kings. The short Hebrew verse-style took hold upon them by its uncultivated austerity. They have no need, like the French, to have the ideas developed, explained in fine clear language, to be modified and connected.<sup>1</sup> The serious and pulsating tone shakes them at once; they understand it with the imagination and the heart; they are not, like Frenchmen, enslaved to logical regularity; and the old text, so free, so lofty and terrible, can retain in their language its wildness and its majesty. More than any people in Europe, by their inner concentration and rigidity, they realise the Semitic conception of the solitary and almighty God; a strange conception, which we, with all our critical methods, have hardly reconstructed within ourselves at the present day. For the Jew, for the powerful minds who wrote the Pentateuch,<sup>2</sup> for the prophets and authors of the Psalms, life as we conceive it, was secluded from living things, plants, animals, firmament, sensible objects, to be carried and concentrated entirely in the one Being of whom they are the work and the puppets. Earth is the footstool of this great God, heaven is His garment. He is in the world, amongst His creatures, as an Oriental king in his tent, amidst his arms and his carpets. If you enter this tent, all vanishes before the absorbing idea of the master; you see but him; nothing has an individual and independent existence: these arms are but made for his hands, these carpets for his foot; you imagine them only as spread for him and trodden by him.

<sup>1</sup> See Lemaistre de Sacy's French translation of the Bible, so slightly biblical.

<sup>2</sup> See Ewald, *Geschichte des Volks Israel*, his apostrophe to the third writer of the Pentateuch, *Erhabener Geist*, etc.

The awe-inspiring face and the menacing voice of the irresistible lord appear behind his instruments. And in a similar manner, for the Jew, nature and men are nothing of themselves; they are for the service of God; they have no other reason for existence; no other use; they vanish before the vast and solitary Being who extended and set high as a mountain before human thought, occupies and covers in Himself the whole horizon. Vainly we attempt, we seed of the Aryan race, to represent to ourselves this devouring God; we always leave some beauty, some interest, some part of free existence to nature; we but half attain to the Creator, with difficulty, after a chain of reasoning, like Voltaire and Kant; more readily we make Him into an architect; we naturally believe in natural laws; we know that the order of the world is fixed; we do not crush things and their relations under the burden of an arbitrary sovereignty; we do not grasp the sublime sentiment of Job, who sees the world trembling and swallowed up at the touch of the strong hand; we cannot endure the intense emotion or repeat the marvellous accent of the psalms, in which, amid the silence of beings reduced to atoms, nothing remains but the heart of man speaking to the eternal Lord. These Englishmen, in the anguish of a troubled conscience, and the oblivion of sensible nature, renew it in part. If the strong and harsh cheer of the Arab, which breaks forth like the blast of a trumpet at the sight of the rising sun and of the bare solitudes,<sup>1</sup> if the mental trances, the short visions of a luminous and grand landscape, if the Semitic colouring are wanting, at least the seriousness and

<sup>1</sup> See Ps. civ. in Luther's admirable translation and in the English translation.

simplicity have remained ; and the Hebraic God brought into the modern conscience, is no less a sovereign in this narrow precinct than in the deserts and mountains from which He sprang. His image is reduced, but His authority is entire ; if He is less poetical, He is more moral. Men read with awe and trembling the history of His Works, the tables of His law, the archives of His vengeance, the proclamation of His promises and menaces ; they are filled with them. Never has a people been seen so deeply imbued by a foreign book, has let it penetrate so far into its manners and writings, its imagination and language. Thenceforth they have found their King, and will follow Him ; no word, lay or ecclesiastic, shall prevail over His word ; they have submitted their conduct to Him, they will give body and life for Him ; and if need be, a day will come when, out of fidelity to Him, they will overthrow the State.

It is not enough to hear this King, they must answer Him ; and religion is not complete until the prayer of the people is added to the revelation of God. In 1548, at last, England received her prayer-book<sup>1</sup> from the hands of Cranmer, Peter Martyr, Bernard Ochin, Melancthon ; the chief and most ardent reformers of Europe were invited to compose a body of doctrines conformable to Scripture, and to express a body of sentiments conformable to the true Christian faith. This prayer-book is an admirable book, in which the full spirit of the Reformation breathes out, where, beside the moving tenderness of the gospel, and the manly

<sup>1</sup> The first Primer of note was in 1545 ; Froude, v. 141. The Prayer-book underwent several changes in 1552, others under Elizabeth, and a few, lastly, at the Restoration.

accents of the Bible, throb the profound emotion, the grave eloquence, the noble-mindedness, the restrained enthusiasm of the heroic and poetic souls who had re-discovered Christianity, and had passed near the fire of martyrdom.

"Almighty and most merciful Father ; We have erred, and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done ; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done ; And there is no health in us. But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare Thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore Thou them that are penitent ; According to Thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake ; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life."

"Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent ; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness."

The same idea of sin, repentance, and moral renovation continually recurs ; the master-thought is always that of the heart humbled before invisible justice, and only imploring His grace in order to obtain His relief. Such a state of mind ennobles man, and introduces a sort of impassioned gravity in all the important actions of his life. Listen to the liturgy of the deathbed, of baptism, of marriage ; the latter first :

"Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy state of Matrimony ?



Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health ; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live !”

These are genuine, honest, and conscientious words. No mystic languor, here or elsewhere. This religion is not made for women who dream, yearn, and sigh, but for men who examine themselves, act and have confidence, confidence in some one more just than themselves. When a man is sick, and his flesh is weak, the priest comes to him, and says :

“ Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly, that it is God’s visitation. And for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you ; whether it be to try your patience for the example of others, . . . or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father ; know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, trusting in God’s mercy, . . . submitting yourself wholly unto His will, it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life ”

A great mysterious sentiment, a sort of sublime epic, void of images, shows darkly amid these probings of the conscience ; I mean a glimpse of the divine government and of the invisible world, the only existences, the only realities, in spite of bodily appearances and of the brute chance, which seems to jumble all things together. Man sees this beyond at distant intervals, and raises himself out of his mire, as though he had suddenly breathed a pure and strengthening atmosphere. Such are the effects of public prayer restored to the

people; for this had been taken from the Latin and rendered into the vulgar tongue: there is a revolution in this very word. Doubtless routine, here as with the ancient missal, will gradually do its sad work; by repeating the same words, man will often do nothing but repeat words; his lips will move whilst his heart remains inert. But in great anguish, in the confused agitations of a restless and hollow mind, at the funerals of his relatives, the strong words of the book will find him in a mood to feel; for they are living,<sup>1</sup> and do not stay in the ears like those of a dead language; they enter the soul; and as soon as the soul is stirred and worked upon, they take root there. If you go and hear these words in England itself, and if you listen to the deep and pulsating accent with which they are pronounced, you will see that they constitute there a national poem, always understood and always efficacious. On Sunday, when all business and pleasure is suspended, between the bare walls of the village church, where no image, no *ex-voto*, no accessory worship distracts the eyes, the seats are full; the powerful Hebraic verses knock like the strokes of a battering-ram at the door of every soul; then the liturgy unfolds its imposing supplications; and at intervals the song of the congregation, combined with the organ, sustains

<sup>1</sup> "To make use of words in a foreign language, merely with a sentiment of devotion, the mind taking no fruit, could be neither pleasing to God, nor beneficial to man. The party that understood not the pith or effectualness of the talk that he made with God, might be as a harp or pipe, having a sound, but not understanding the noise that itself had made; a Christian man was more than an instrument; and he had therefore provided a determinate form of supplication in the English tongue, that his subjects might be able to pray like reasonable beings in their own language."—*Letter of Henry VIII. to Cranmer*. Froude, iv. 436.

the people's devotion. There is nothing graver and more simple than this singing by the people; no scales, no elaborate melody; it is not calculated for the gratification of the ear, and yet it is free from the sickly sadness, from the gloomy monotony which the middle-age has left in the chanting in Roman Catholic churches; neither monkish nor pagan, it rolls like a manly yet sweet melody, neither contrasting with nor obscuring the words which accompany it; these words are psalms translated into verse, yet lofty; diluted, but not embellished. Everything harmonises—place, music, text, ceremony—to place every man, personally and without a mediator, in presence of a just God, and to form a moral poetry which shall sustain and develop the moral sense.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bishop John Fisher's *Funeral Oration of the Countess of Richmond* (ed. 1711) shows to what practices this religion succeeded. The Countess was the mother of Henry VII., and translated the *Myrrours of Golde*, and *The Forthe Boke of the Followynge Jesus Chryst* :—

"As for fastynge, for age, and feebleness, albeit she were not bound yet those days that by the Church were appointed, she kept them diligently and seriously, and in especial the holy Lent, throughout that she restrained her appetite till one meal of fish on the day; besides her other peculiar fasts of devotion, as St. Anthony, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine, with other; and throughout all the year the Friday and Saturday she full truly observed. As to hard clothes wearing, she had her shirts and girdles of hair, which, when she was in health, every week she failed not certain days to wear, sometime the one, sometime the other, that full often her skin, as I heard say, was pierced therewith.

"In prayer, every day at her uprising, which commonly was not long after five of the clock, she began certain devotions, and so after them, with one of her gentlewomen, the matins of our Lady; which kept her to them, she came into her closet, where then with her chaplain she said also matins of the day; and after that, daily heard four or five masses upon her knees; so continuing in her prayers and devotions unto the hour of dinner, which of the eating day was ten of the clocks, and upon the fasting day eleven. After dinner full truly she would go her stations to three altars daily; daily her dirges and commendations she would say, and her even songs before supper, both of the day

One detail is still needed to complete this manly religion—human reason. The minister ascends the pulpit and speaks: he speaks coldly, I admit, with literary comments and over-long demonstrations; but solidly, seriously, like a man who desires to convince, and that by honest means, who addresses only the reason, and discourses only of justice. With Latimer and his contemporaries, preaching, like religion, changes its object and character; like religion, it becomes popular and moral, and appropriate to those who hear it, to recall them to their duties. Few men have deserved better of their fellows, in life and word, than he. He was a genuine Englishman, conscientious, courageous, a man of common sense and practical, sprung from the labouring and independent class, the very heart and sinews of the nation. His father, a brave yeoman, had a farm of about four pounds a year, on which he employed half a dozen men, with thirty cows which his wife milked, a good soldier of the king, keeping equipment for himself and his horse so as to join the army if need were,

and of our Lady, beside many other prayers and psalters of David throughout the year; and at night before she went to bed, she failed not to resort unto her chapel, and there a large quarter of an hour to occupy her devotions. No marvel, though all this long time her kneeling was to her painful, and so painful that many times it caused in her back pain and disease. And yet nevertheless, daily, when she was in health, she failed not to say the crown of our lady, which, after the manner of Rome, containeth sixty and three aves, and at every ave, to make a kneeling. As for meditation, she had divers books in French, wherewith she would occupy herself when she was weary of prayer. Wherefore divers she did translate out of the French into English. Her marvellous weeping they can bear witness of, which here before have heard her confession, which be divers and many, and at many seasons in the year, lightly every third day. Can also record the same those that were present at any time when she was houshylda, which was full nigh a dozen times every year, what floods of tears there issued forth of her eyes!"



*BISHOP LATIMER*







training his son to use the bow, making him buckle on his breastplate, and finding a few nobles at the bottom of his purse wherewith to send him to school, and thence to the university.<sup>1</sup> Little Latimer studied eagerly, took his degrees, and continued long a good Catholic, or, as he says, "in darckense and in the shadow of death." At about thirty, having often heard Bilney the martyr, and having, moreover, studied the world and thought for himself, he, as he tells us, "began from that time forward to smell the word of God, and to forsooke the Schoole Doctours, and such fooleries;" presently to preach, and forthwith to pass for a seditious man, very troublesome to those men in authority who did not act with justice. For this was in the first place the salient feature of his eloquence: he spoke to people of their duties, in exact terms. One day, when he preached before the university, the Bishop of Ely came, curious to hear him. Immediately he changed his subject, and drew the portrait of a perfect prelate, a portrait which did not tally well with the bishop's character; and he was denounced for the act. When he was made chaplain of Henry VIII., awe-inspiring as the king was, little as he was himself, he dared to write to him freely to bid him stop the persecution which was set on foot, and to prevent the interdiction of the Bible; verily he risked his life. He had done it before, he did it again; like Tyndale, Knox, all the leaders of the Reformation, he lived in almost ceaseless expectation of death, and in contemplation of the stake. Sick, liable to racking headaches, stomachaches, pleurisy, stone, he wrought a vast work, travelling, writing, preaching, delivering at the age of sixty-seven two sermons every Sunday, and

<sup>1</sup> See vol. i. p. 159, note 1.

generally rising at two in the morning, winter and summer, to study. Nothing can be simpler or more effective than his eloquence; and the reason is, that he never speaks for the sake of speaking, but of doing work. His sermons, amongst others those which he preached before the young king Edward VI., are not, like those of Massillon before the youthful Louis XV., hung in the air, in the calm region of philosophical amplifications: Latimer wishes to correct, and he attacks actual vices, vices which he has seen, which every one can point at with the finger; he too points them out, calls things by their name, and people too, giving facts and details, bravely; and sparing nobody, sets himself without hesitation to denounce and reform iniquity. Universal as his morality is, ancient as is his text, he applies it to his contemporaries, to his audience, at times to the judges who are there "in velvet cotes," who will not hear the poor, who give but a dog's hearing to such a woman in a twelvemonth, and who leave another poor woman in the Fleet, refusing to accept bail;<sup>1</sup> at times to the king's officers, whose thefts he enumerates, whom he sets between hell and restitution, and of whom he obtains, nay extorts, pound for pound, the stolen money.<sup>2</sup> From abstract iniquity he proceeds always to special abuse; for it is abuse which cries out and demands, not a discourser, but a champion. With him theology holds but a secondary place; before all, practice: the true offence against God in his eyes is a bad action; the true service, the suppression of bad deeds. And see by what paths he reaches this. No grand words, no show

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Seven Sermons before Edward VI.*, ed. Edward Arber, 1889. Second sermon, pp. 73 and 74.

<sup>2</sup> Latimer's *Sermons*. Fifth sermon, ed. Arber, p. 147.

of style, no exhibition of dialectics. He relates his life, the lives of others, giving dates, numbers, places; he abounds in anecdotes, little obvious circumstances, fit to enter the imagination and arouse the recollections of each hearer. He is familiar, at times humorous, and always so precise, so impressed with real events and particularities of English life, that we might glean from his sermons an almost complete description of the manners of his age and country. To reprove the great, who appropriate common lands by their enclosures, he details the needs of the peasant, without the least care for conventional proprieties; he is not working now for conventionalities, but to produce convictions:—

“A plough land must have sheep; yea, they must have sheep to dung their ground for bearing of corn; for if they have no sheep to help to fat the ground, they shall have but bare corn and thin. They must have swine for their food, to make their veneries or bacon of: their bacon is their venison, for they shall now have *hangum turum*, if they get any other venison; so that bacon is their necessary meat to feed on, which they may not lack. They must have other cattle: as horses to draw their plough, and for carriage of things to the markets; and kine for their milk and cheese, which they must live upon and pay their rents. These cattle must have pasture, which pasture if they lack, the rest must needs fail them: and pasture they cannot have, if the land be taken in, and enclosed from them.”<sup>1</sup>

Another time, to put his hearers on their guard against hasty judgments, he relates that, having entered the gaol at Cambridge to exhort the prisoners, he found a woman accused of having killed her child, who would make no confession:—

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Corrie, 1844, 2 vols., *Last Sermon preached before Edward VI.*, i. 249.

"Which denying gave us occasion to search for the matter, and so we did. And at the length we found that her husband loved her not ; and therefore he sought means to make her out of the way. The matter was thus : ' a child of hers had been sick by the space of a year, and so decayed as it were in a consumption. At the length it died in harvest-time. She went to her neighbours and other friends to desire their help, to prepare the child to the burial : but there was nobody at home ; every man was in the field. The woman, in an heaviness and trouble of spirit, went, and being herself alone, prepared the child to the burial. Her husband coming home, not having great love towards her, accused her of the murder ; and so she was taken and brought to Cambridge. But as far forth as I could learn through earnest inquisition, I thought in my conscience the woman was not guilty, all the circumstances well considered. Immediately after this I was called to preach before the king, which was my first sermon that I made before his majesty, and it was done at Windsor ; when his majesty, after the sermon was done, did most familiarly talk with me in the gallery. Now, when I saw my time, I kneeled down before his majesty, opening the whole matter ; and afterwards most humbly desired his majesty to pardon that woman. For I thought in my conscience she was not guilty ; else I would not for all the world sue for a murderer. The king most graciously heard my humble request, insomuch that I had a pardon ready for her at my return homeward. In the mean season that same woman was delivered of a child in the tower at Cambridge, whose godfather I was, and Mistress Cheke was godmother. But all that time I hid my pardon, and told her nothing of it, only exhorting her to confess the truth. At the length the time came when she looked to suffer : I came, as I was wont to do, to instruct her ; she made great moan to me, and most earnestly required me that I would find the means that she might be purified before her suffering ; for she thought she should have been damned, if she should suffer without purification. . . . So we travailed with

this woman till we brought her to a good trade ; and at the length shewed her the king's pardon, and let her go.'

"This tale I told you by this occasion, that though some women be very unnatural, and forget their children, yet when we hear anybody so report, we should not be too hasty in believing the tale, but rather suspend our judgments till we know the truth."<sup>1</sup>

When a man preaches thus, he is believed ; we are sure that he is not reciting a lesson ; we feel that he has seen, that he draws his moral not from books, but from facts ; that his counsels come from the solid basis whence everything ought to come,—I mean from manifold and personal experience. Many a time have I listened to popular orators, who address the pocket, and prove their talent by the money they have collected ; it is thus that they hold forth, with circumstantial, recent, proximate examples, with conversational turns of speech, setting aside great arguments and fine language. Imagine the ascendancy of the Scriptures enlarged upon in such words ; to what strata of the people it could descend, what a hold it had upon sailors, workmen, servants ! Consider, again, how the authority of these words is doubled by the courage, independence, integrity, unassailable and recognised virtue of him who utters them. He spoke the truth to the king, unmasked robbers, incurred all kind of hate, resigned his see rather than sign anything against his conscience ; and at eighty years, under Mary, refusing to recant, after two years of prison and waiting—and what waiting ! he was led to the stake. His companion, Ridley, slept the night before as calmly, we are told, as ever

<sup>1</sup> *Latimer's Sermons*, ed. Corrie, *First Sermon on the Lord's Prayer*, i. 335.

he did in his life ; and when ready to be chained to the post, said aloud, " O heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks, for that Thou hast called me to be a professor of Thee, even unto death." Latimer in his turn, when they brought the lighted faggots, cried, " Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man : we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." He then bathed his hands in the flames, and resigning his soul to God, he expired.

He had judged rightly : it is by this supreme trial that a creed proves its strength and gains its adherents ; tortures are a sort of propaganda as well as a testimony, and make converts whilst they make martyrs. All the writings of the time, and all the commentaries which may be added to them, are weak compared to the actions which, one after the other, shone forth at that time from learned and unlearned, down to the most simple and ignorant. In three years, under Mary, nearly three hundred persons, men, women, old and young, some all but children, allowed themselves to be burned alive rather than to abjure. The all-powerful idea of God, and of the faith due to Him, made them resist all the protests of nature, and all the trembling of the flesh. " No one will be crowned," said one of them, " but they who fight like men ; and he who endures to the end shall be saved." Doctor Rogers was burned first, in presence of his wife and ten children, one at the breast. He had not been told beforehand, and was sleeping soundly. The wife of the keeper of Newgate woke him, and told him that he must burn that day. " Then," said he, " I need not truss my points." In the midst of the flames he did not seem to suffer.

"His children stood by consoling him, in such a way that he looked as if they were conducting him to a merry marriage."<sup>1</sup> A young man of nineteen, William Hunter, apprenticed to a silk-weaver, was exhorted by his parents to persevere to the end :—

"In the mean time William's father and mother came to him, and desired heartily of God that he might continue to the end in that good way which he had begun : and his mother said to him, that she was glad that ever she was so happy to bear such a child, which could find in his heart to lose his life for Christ's name's sake.

"Then William said to his mother, 'For my little pain which I shall suffer, which is but a short braid, Christ hath promised me, mother (said he), a crown of joy : may you not be glad of that, mother?' With that his mother kneeled down on her knees, saying, 'I pray God strengthen thee, my son, to the end ; yea, I think thee as well-bestowed as any child that ever I bare.' . . .

"Then William Hunter plucked up his gown, and stepped over the parlour groundsel, and went forward cheerfully ; the sheriff's servant taking him by one arm, and I his brother by another. And thus going in the way, he met with his father according to his dream, and he spake to his son weeping, and saying, 'God be with thee, son William ;' and William said, 'God be with you, good father, and be of good comfort ; for I hope we shall meet again, when we shall be merry.' His father said, 'I hope so, William ;' and so departed. So William went to the place where the stake stood, even according to his dream, where all things were very unready. Then William took a wet broom-faggot, and kneeled down thereon, and read the fifty-first

<sup>1</sup> Noailles, the French (and Catholic) Ambassador. John Fox, *History of the Acts and Monuments of the Church*, ed. Townsend, 1843, 8 vols., vi. 612, says : "His wife and children, being eleven in number, and ten able to go, and one sucking on her breast, met him by the way as he went towards Smithfield."—Ta.

Psalm, till he came to these words, 'The sacrifice of God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' . . .

"Then said the sheriff, 'Here is a letter from the queen. If thou wilt recant thou shalt live; if not, thou shalt be burned.' 'No,' quoth William, 'I will not recant, God willing.' Then William rose and went to the stake, and stood upright to it. Then came one Richard Ponde, a bailiff, and made fast the chain about William.

"Then said master Brown, 'Here is not wood enough to burn a leg of him.' Then said William, 'Good people! pray for me; and make speed and despatch quickly: and pray for me while you see me alive, good people! and I will pray for you likewise.' 'Now?' quoth master Brown, 'pray for thee! I will pray no more for thee, than I will pray for a dog.' . . .

"Then was there a gentleman which said, 'I pray God have mercy upon his soul.' The people said, 'Amen, Amen.'

"Immediately fire was made. Then William cast his psalter right into his brother's hand, who said, 'William! think on the holy passion of Christ, and be not afraid of death.' And William answered, 'I am not afraid.' Then lift he up his hands to heaven, and said, 'Lord, Lord, Lord, receive my spirit;' and, casting down his head again into the smothering smoke, he yielded up his life for the truth, sealing it with his blood to the praise of God."<sup>1</sup>

When a passion is able thus to subdue the natural affections, it is able also to subdue bodily pain; all the ferocity of the time laboured in vain against inward convictions. Thomas Tomkins, a weaver of Shoreditch, being asked by Bonner if he could stand the fire well, bade him try it. "Bonner took Tomkins by the fingers, and held his hand directly over the flame," to terrify him. But "he never shrank, till the veins

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *History of the Acts*, etc., vi. 727.



shrank and the sinews burst, and the water (blood) did spirt in Mr. Harpsfield's face."<sup>1</sup> "In the Isle of Guernsey, a woman with child being ordered to the fire, was delivered in the flames, and the infant being taken from her, was ordered by the magistrates to be thrown back into the fire."<sup>2</sup> Bishop Hooper was burned three times over in a small fire of green wood. There was too little wood, and the wind turned aside the smoke. He cried out, "For God's love, good people, let me have more fire." His legs and thighs were roasted; one of his hands fell off before he expired; he endured thus three-quarters of an hour; before him in a box was his pardon, on condition that he would retract. Against long sufferings in mephitic prisons, against everything which might unnerve or seduce, these men were invincible: five died of hunger at Canterbury; they were in irons night and day, with no covering but their clothes, on rotten straw; yet there was an understanding amongst them, that the "cross of persecution" was a blessing from God, "an inestimable jewel, a sovereign antidote, well-approved, to cure love of self and earthly affection." Before such examples the people were shaken. A woman wrote to Bishop Bonner, that there was not a child but called him Bonner the hangman, and knew on his fingers, as well as he knew his pater, the exact number of those he had burned at the stake, or suffered to die of hunger in prison these nine months. "You have lost the hearts of twenty thousand persons who were inveterate Papists a year ago." The spectators encouraged the martyrs, and cried out to them that their

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *History of the Acts*, etc., vi. 719.

<sup>2</sup> Neal, *History of the Puritans*, ed. Toulmin, 5 vols., 1793, i. 96.

cause was just. The Catholic envoy Renard wrote to Charles V. that it was said that several had desired to take their place at the stake, by the side of those who were being burned. In vain the queen had forbidden, on pain of death, all marks of approbation. "We know that they are men of God," cried one of the spectators; "that is why we cannot help saying, God strengthen them." And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen." What wonder if, at the coming of Elizabeth, England cast in her lot with Protestantism? The threats of the Armada urged her on still further; and the Reformation became national under the pressure of foreign hostility, as it had become popular through the triumph of its martyrs.

#### IV.

Two distinct branches receive the common sap,—one above, the other beneath: one respected, flourishing, shooting forth in the open air; the other despised, half buried in the ground, trodden under foot by those who would crush it: both living, the Anglican as well as the Puritan, the one in spite of the effort made to destroy it, the other in spite of the care taken to develop it.

The court has its religion, like the country—a sincere and winning religion. Amid the pagan poetry which up to the Revolution always had the ear of the world, we find gradually piercing through and rising higher a grave and grand idea which sent its roots to the depth of the public mind. Many poets, Drayton, Davies, Cowley, Giles Fletcher, Quarles, Crashaw, wrote sacred histories, pious or moral verses, noble stanzas on death and the immortality of the soul,

on the frailty of things human, and on the supreme providence in which alone man finds the support of his weakness and the consolation of his sufferings. In the greatest prose writers, Bacon, Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Raleigh, we see spring up the fruits of veneration, thoughts about the obscure beyond ; in short, faith and prayer. Several prayers written by Bacon are amongst the finest known ; and the courtier Raleigh, whilst writing of the fall of empires, and how the barbarous nations had destroyed this grand and magnificent Roman Empire, ended his book with the ideas and tone of a Bossuet.<sup>1</sup> Picture Saint Paul's in London, and the fashionable people who used to meet there ; the gentlemen who noisily made the rowels of their spurs resound on entering, looked around and carried on conversation during service, who swore by God's eyes, God's eyelids, who amongst the vaults and chapels showed off their beribboned shoes, their chains, scarves, satin doublets, velvet cloaks, their braggadocio manners and stage attitudes. All this was very free, very loose, very far from our modern decency. But pass over youthful bluster ; take man in his great moments, in prison, in danger, or indeed when old age arrives, when he has come to judge of life ; take him, above all, in the country, on his estate, far from any town, in the church of the village where he is lord ; or again, when he is alone in the evening, at his table, listening to the prayer offered up by his chaplain, having

<sup>1</sup> "O eloquent, just, and mightie Death ! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded ; what none hath dared, thou hast done ; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised ; thou hast drawne together all the farre stretched greatnesse, all the pride, crueltie, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet.*"

no books but some big folio of dramas, well dog's-eared by his pages, and his prayer-book and Bible; you may then understand how the new religion tightens its hold on these imaginative and serious minds. It does not shock them by a narrow rigour; it does not fetter the flight of their mind; it does not attempt to extinguish the buoyant flame of their fancy; it does not proscribe the beautiful: it preserves more than any reformed church the noble pomp of the ancient worship, and rolls under the domes of its cathedrals the rich modulations, the majestic harmonies of its grave, organ-led music. It is its characteristic not to be in opposition to the world, but, on the contrary, to draw it nearer to itself, by bringing itself nearer to it. By its secular condition as well as by its external worship, it is embraced by and it embraces it: its head is the Queen, it is a part of the Constitution, it sends its dignitaries to the House of Lords; it suffers its priests to marry; its benefices are in the nomination of the great families; its chief members are the younger sons of these same families: by all these channels it imbibes the spirit of the age. In its hands, therefore, reformation cannot become hostile to science, to poetry, to the liberal ideas of the Renaissance. Nay, in the nobles of Elizabeth and James I., as in the cavaliers of Charles I., it tolerates artistic tastes, philosophical curiosity, the ways of the world, and the sentiment of the beautiful. The alliance is so strong, that, under Cromwell, the ecclesiastics in a mass were dismissed for their king's sake, and the cavaliers died wholesale for the Church. The two societies mutually touch and are confounded together. If several poets are pious, several ecclesiastics are poetical,—Bishop Hall, Bishop

Corbet, Wither a rector, and the preacher Donne. If several laymen rise to religious contemplations, several theologians, Hooker, John Hales, Taylor, Chillingworth, set philosophy and reason by the side of dogma. Accordingly we find a new literature arising, lofty and original, eloquent and moderate, armed at the same time against the Puritans, who sacrifice freedom of intellect to the tyranny of the text, and against the Catholics, who sacrifice independence of criticism to the tyranny of tradition; opposed equally to the servility of literal interpretation, and the servility of a prescribed interpretation. Opposed to the first appears the learned and excellent Hooker, one of the gentlest and most conciliatory of men, the most solid and persuasive of logicians, a comprehensive mind, who in every question ascends to the principles,<sup>1</sup> introduces into controversy general conceptions, and the knowledge of human nature;<sup>2</sup> beyond this, a

<sup>1</sup> Hooker's Works, ed. Keble, 1886, 3 vols., *The Ecclesiastical Polity*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. book i. 249, 258, 312 :—

"That which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure of working, the same we term a Law. . . .

"Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether, though it were but for awhile, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, . . . if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness, begin to stand and to rest himself: . . . what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world? . . .

"Between men and beasts there is no possibility of sociable com-

methodical writer, correct and always ample, worthy of being regarded not only as one of the fathers of the English Church, but as one of the founders of English prose. With a sustained gravity and simplicity, he shows the Puritans that the laws of nature, reason, and society, like the law of Scripture, are of divine institution, that all are equally worthy of respect and obedience, that we must not sacrifice the inner word, by which God reaches our intellect, to the outer word, by which God reaches our senses; that thus the civil constitution of the Church, and the visible ordinance of ceremonies, may be conformable to the will of God, even when they are not justified by a clear text of Scripture; and that the authority of the magistrates, as well as the reason of man, does not exceed its rights in establishing certain uniformities and disciplines on which Scripture is silent, in order that reason may decide:—

“For if the natural strength of man's wit may by experience and study attain unto such ripeness in the knowledge of things

munion because the well-spring of that communion is a natural delight which man hath to transfuse from himself into others, and to receive from others into himself, especially those things wherein the excellency of his kind doth most consist. The chiefest instrument of human communion therefore is speech, because thereby we impart mutually one to another the conceits of our reasonable understanding. And for that cause, seeing beasts are not hereof capable, forasmuch as with them we can use no such conference, they being in degree, although above other creatures on earth to whom nature hath denied sense, yet lower than to be sociable companions of man to whom nature hath given reason; it is of Adam said, that amongst the beasts ‘he found not for himself any meet companion.’ Civil society doth more content the nature of man than any private kind of solitary living, because in society this good of mutual participation is so much larger than otherwise. Herewith notwithstanding we are not satisfied, but we covet (if it might be) to have a kind of society and fellowship even with all mankind.”

human, that men in this respect may presume to build somewhat upon their judgment ; what reason have we to think but that even in matters divine, the like wits furnished with necessary helps, exercised in Scripture with like diligence, and assisted with the grace of Almighty God, may grow unto so much perfection of knowledge, that men shall have just cause, when anything pertinent unto faith and religion is doubted of, the more willingly to incline their minds towards that which the sentence of so grave, wise, and learned in that faculty shall judge most sound." <sup>1</sup>

This "natural light" therefore must not be despised, but rather used so as to augment the other, as we put torch to torch ; above all, employed that we may live in harmony with each other.<sup>2</sup>

"Far more comfort it were for us (so small is the joy we take in these strifes) to labour under the same yoke, as men that look for the same eternal reward of their labours, to be conjoined with you in bands of indissoluble love and amity, to live as if our persons being many, our souls were but one, rather than in such dismembered sort to spend our few and wretched days in a tedious prosecuting of wearisome contentions."

In fact, the conclusions of the greatest theologians are for such harmony: abandoning an oppressive practice they grasp a liberal spirit. If by its political structure the English Church is persecuting, by its doctrinal structure it is tolerant ; it needs the reason of the laity too much to refuse it liberty ; it lives in a world too cultivated and thoughtful to proscribe thought and culture. John Hales, its most eminent doctor, declared several

<sup>1</sup> *Ecc. Pol.* i. book ii. ch. vii. 4, p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Dialogues of Galileo*. The same idea which is persecuted by the church at Rome is at the same time defended by the church in England. See also *Ecc. Pol.* i. book iii. 461-481.

times that he would renounce the Church of England to-morrow if she insisted on the doctrine that other Christians would be damned; and that men believe other people to be damned only when they desire them to be so.<sup>1</sup> It was he again, a theologian, a prebendary, who advises men to trust to themselves alone in religious matters; to leave nothing to authority, or antiquity, or the majority; to use their own reason in believing, as they use "their own legs in walking;" to act and be men in mind as well as in the rest; and to regard as cowardly and impious the borrowing of doctrine and sloth of thought. So Chillingworth, a notably militant and loyal mind, the most exact, the most penetrating, and the most convincing of controversialists, first Protestant, then Catholic, then Protestant again and for ever, has the courage to say that these great changes, wrought in himself and by himself, through study and research, are, of all his actions, those which satisfy him most. He maintains that reason alone applied to Scripture ought to persuade men; that authority has no claim in it; that nothing is more against religion than to force religion; that the great principle of the Reformation is liberty of conscience; and that if the doctrines of the different Protestant sects are not absolutely true, at least they are free from all impiety and from all error damnable in itself, or destructive of salvation. Thus is developed a new school of polemics, a theology, a solid and rational apologetics, rigorous in its arguments, capable of expansion, confirmed by science, and which, authorizing independence of personal judgment at the same time with the inter-

<sup>1</sup> Clarendon. See the same doctrines in Jeremy Taylor, *Liberty of Prophesying*, 1647.







*SIR PHILIP SIDNEY*



vention of the natural reason, leaves religion within reach of the world and the establishments of the past struggling with the future.

A writer of genius appears amongst these, a prose-poet, gifted with an imagination like Spenser and Shakespeare,—Jeremy Taylor, who, from the bent of his mind as well as from circumstances, was destined to present the alliance of the Renaissance with the Reformation, and to carry into the pulpit the ornate style of the court. A preacher at St. Paul's, appreciated and admired by men of fashion for his youthful and fresh beauty and his graceful bearing, as also for his splendid diction; patronised and promoted by Archbishop Laud, he wrote for the king a defence of episcopacy; became chaplain to the king's army; was taken, ruined, twice imprisoned by the Parliamentarians; married a natural daughter of Charles I.; then, after the Restoration, was loaded with honours; became a bishop, member of the Privy Council, and vice-chancellor of the university of Dublin. In every passage of his life, fortunate or otherwise, private or public, we see that he is an Anglican, a royalist, imbued with the spirit of the cavaliers and courtiers, not with their vices. On the contrary, there was never a better or more upright man, more zealous in his duties, more tolerant by principle; so that, preserving a Christian gravity and purity, he received from the Renaissance only its rich imagination, its classical erudition, and its liberal spirit. But he had these gifts entire, as they existed in the most brilliant and original of the men of the world, in Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, with the graces, splendours, refinements which are characteristic of these sensitive and creative geniuses, and yet with the redundancies,

singularities, incongruities inevitable in an age when excess of spirit prevented the soundness of taste. Like all these writers, like Montaigne, he was imbued with classic antiquity; in the pulpit he quotes Greek and Latin anecdotes, passages from Seneca, verses of Lucretius and Euripides, and this side by side with texts from the Bible, from the Gospels, and the Fathers. Cant was not yet in vogue; the two great sources of teaching, Christian and Pagan, ran side by side; they were collected in the same vessel, without imagining that the wisdom of reason and nature could mar the wisdom of faith and revelation. Fancy these strange sermons, in which the two eruditions, Hellenic and Evangelic, flow together with their texts, and each text in its own language; in which, to prove that fathers are often unfortunate in their children, the author brings forward one after the other, Chabrias, Germanicus, Marcus Aurelius, Hortensius, Quintus Fabius Maximus, Scipio Africanus, Moses, and Samuel; where, in the form of comparisons and illustrations is heaped up the spoil of histories, and authorities on botany, astronomy, zoology, which the cyclopædias and scientific fancies at that time poured into the brain. Taylor will relate to you the history of the bears of Pannonia, which, when wounded, will press the iron deeper home; or of the apples of Sodom, which are beautiful to the gaze, but full within of rottenness and worms; and many others of the same kind. For it was a characteristic of men of this age and school, not to possess a mind swept, levelled, regulated, laid out in straight paths, like the seventeenth century writers in France, and like the gardens at Versailles, but full, and crowded with circumstantial facts, complete dramatic scenes, little coloured pictures,

pellmell and badly dusted; so that, lost in confusion and dust, the modern spectator cries out at their pedantry and coarseness. Metaphors swarm one above the other, jumbled, blocking each other's path, as in Shakspeare. We think to follow one, and a second begins, then a third cutting into the second, and so on, flower after flower, firework after firework, so that the brightness becomes misty with sparks, and the sight ends in a haze. On the other hand, and just by virtue of this same turn of mind, Taylor imagines objects, not vaguely and feebly, by some indistinct general conception, but precisely, entire, as they are, with their visible colour, their proper form, the multitude of true and particular details which distinguish them in their species. He is not acquainted with them by hearsay; he has seen them. Better, he sees them now and makes them to be seen. Read the following extract, and say if it does not seem to have been copied from a hospital, or from a field of battle:—

“And what can we complain of the weakness of our strengths, or the pressures of diseases, when we see a poor soldier stand in a breach almost starved with cold and hunger, and his cold apt to be relieved only by the heats of anger, a fever, or a fired musket, and his hunger slackened by a greater pain and a huge fear? This man shall stand in his arms and wounds, *patiens luminis atque solis*, pale and faint, weary and watchful; and at night shall have a bullet pulled out of his flesh, and shivers from his bones, and endure his mouth to be sewed up from a violent rent to its own dimensions; and all this for a man whom he never saw, or, if he did, was not noted by him; but one that shall condemn him to the gallows if he runs away from all this misery.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Taylor's Works, ed. Eden, 1840, 10 vols., *Holy Dying*, ch. iii. sec. 4, § 2, p. 315.

This is the advantage of a full imagination over ordinary reason. It produces in a lump twenty or thirty ideas, and as many images, exhausting the subject which the other only outlines and sketches. There are a thousand circumstances and shades in every event; and they are all grasped in living words like these:—

“For so have I seen the little purls of a spring sweat through the bottom of a bank, and intenerate the stubborn pavement, till it hath made it fit for the impression of a child’s foot; and it was despised, like the descending pearls of a misty morning, till it had opened its way and made a stream large enough to carry away the ruins of the undermined strand, and to invade the neighbouring gardens; but then the despised drops were grown into an artificial river, and an intolerable mischief. So are the first entrances of sin, stopped with the antidotes of a hearty prayer, and checked into sobriety by the eye of a reverend man, or the counsels of a single sermon; but when such beginnings are neglected, and our religion hath not in it so much philosophy as to think anything evil as long as we can endure it, they grow up to ulcers and pestilential evils; they destroy the soul by their abode, who at their first entry might have been killed with the pressure of a little finger.”<sup>1</sup>

All extremes meet in that imagination. The cavaliers who heard him, found, as in Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher, the crude copy of the most coarse and unclean truth, and the light music of the most graceful and airy fancies; the smell and horrors of a dissecting room,<sup>2</sup> and all on a sudden the freshness and cheerfulness of smiling dawn; the hateful detail of leprosy, its white spots, its inner rottenness; and then this lovely picture of a lark, rising amid the early perfumes of the fields:—

<sup>1</sup> Sermon xvi., *Of Growth in Sin*.

<sup>2</sup> “We have already opened up this dunghill covered with snow, which was indeed on the outside white as the spots of leprosy.”



"For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, than it could recover by the vibration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air, about his ministries here below. So is the prayer of a good man."<sup>1</sup>

And he continues with the charm, sometimes with the very words, of Shakspeare. In the preacher, as well as in the poet, as well as in all the cavaliers and all the artists of the time, the imagination is so full, that it reaches the real, even to its filth, and the ideal as far as its heaven.

How could true religious sentiment thus accommodate itself to such a frank and worldly gait? This, however, is what it has done; and more—the latter has generated the former. With Taylor, as well as with the others, bold poetry leads to profound faith. If this alliance astonishes us to-day, it is because in this respect people have grown pedantic. We take a formal man for a religious man. We are content to see him stiff in his black coat, choked in a white neckerchief, with a prayer-book in his hand. We confound piety with decency, propriety, permanent and perfect regularity. We proscribe to a man of faith all candid speech, all bold gesture, all fire and dash in word or act; we are shocked by Luther's rude words, the bursts of

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Grove Sermons*: V. "The Return of Prayers."

laughter which shook his mighty paunch, his rages like a working-man, his plain and free speaking, the audacious familiarity with which he treats Christ and the Deity.<sup>1</sup> We do not perceive that these freedoms and this recklessness are precisely signs of entire belief, that warm and immoderate conviction is too sure of itself to be tied down to an irreproachable style, that impulsive religion consists not of punctilios but of emotions. It is a poem, the greatest of all, a poem believed in; this is why these men found it at the end of their poesy: the way of looking at the world, adopted by Shakspeare and all the tragic poets, led to it; another step, and Jacques, Hamlet, would be there. That vast obscurity, that black unexplored ocean, "the unknown country," which they saw on the verge of our sad life, who knows whether it is not bounded by another shore? The troubled notion of the shadowy beyond is national, and this is why the national renaissance at this time became Christian. When Taylor speaks of death he only takes up and works out a thought which Shakspeare had already sketched:—

"All the succession of time, all the changes in nature, all the varieties of light and darkness, the thousand thousands of accidents in the world, and every contingency to every man, and to every creature, doth preach our funeral sermon, and calls us to look and see how the old sexton Time throws up the earth, and digs a grave where we must lay our sins or our sorrows, and sow

<sup>1</sup> Luther's *Table Talk*, ed. Hazlitt, No. 187, p. 80: When Jesus Christ was born, he doubtless cried and wept like other children, and his mother tended him as other mothers tend their children. As he grew up he was submissive to his parents, and waited on them, and carried his supposed father's dinner to him; and when he came back, Mary no doubt often said, "My dear little Jesus, where hast thou been?"

our bodies, till they rise again in a fair or in an intolerable eternity."

For beside this final death, which swallows us whole, there are partial deaths which devour us piecemeal :—

"Every revolution which the sun makes about the world, divides between life and death ; and death possesses both those portions by the next morrow ; and we are dead to all those months which we have already lived, and we shall never live them over again : and still God makes little periods of our age. First we change our world, when we come from the womb to feel the warmth of the sun. Then we sleep and enter into the image of death, in which state we are unconcerned in all the changes of the world : and if our mothers or our nurses die, or a wild boar destroy our vineyards, or our king be sick, we regard it not, but during that state are as disinterested as if our eyes were closed with the clay that weeps in the bowels of the earth. At the end of seven years our teeth fall and die before us, representing a formal prologue to the tragedy ; and still every seven years it is odds but we shall finish the last scene : and when nature, or chance, or vice, takes our body in pieces, weakening some parts and loosing others, we taste the grave and the solemnities of our own funerals, first in those parts that ministered to vice, and next in them that served for ornament, and in a short time even they that served for necessity become useless, and entangled like the wheels of a broken clock. Baldness is but a dressing to our funerals, the proper ornament of mourning, and of a person entered very far into the regions and possession of death : and we have many more of the same signification ; gray hairs, rotten teeth, dim eyes, trembling joints, short breath, stiff limbs, wrinkled skin, short memory, decayed appetite. Every day's necessity calls for a reparation of that portion which death fed on all night, when we lay in his lap and slept in his outer chambers. The very spirits of a man prey upon the daily portion of bread and flesh, and every meal is a rescue from one

death, and lays up for another ; and while we think a thought, we die ; and the clock strikes, and reckons on our portion of eternity : we form our words with the breath of our nostrils, we have the less to live upon for every word we speak.”<sup>1</sup>

Beyond all these destructions other destructions are at work ; chance mows us down as well as nature, and we are the prey of accident as well as of necessity :—

“ Thus nature calls us to meditate of death by those things which are the instruments of acting it : and God by all the variety of His providence makes us see death everywhere, in all variety of circumstances, and dressed up for all the fancies, and the expectation of every single person.<sup>2</sup> . . . And how many teeming mothers have rejoiced over their swelling wombs, and pleased themselves in becoming the channels of blessing to a family, and the midwife hath quickly bound their heads and feet and carried them forth to burial!<sup>3</sup> . . . You can go no whither but you tread upon a dead man’s bones.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus these powerful words roll on, sublime as an organ motett ; this universal crushing out of human vanities has the funeral grandeur of a tragedy ; piety in this instance proceeds from eloquence, and genius leads to faith. All the powers and all the tenderness of the soul are moved. It is not a cold rigorist who speaks ; it is a man, a moved man, with senses and a heart, who has become a Christian not by mortification, but by the developement of his whole being :—

“ Reckon but from the sprightfulness of youth, and the fair cheeks and full eyes of childhood, from the vigorousness and strong flexure of the joints of five and twenty, to the hollowness and dead paleness, to the loathsomeness and horror of a three

<sup>1</sup> *Holy Dying*, ed. Eden, ch. i. sec. i. p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 267.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 268.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. 269.

days' burial, and we shall perceive the distance to be very great and very strange. But so have I seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven as a lamb's fleece ; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness, and to decline to softness and the symptoms of a sickly age ; it bowed the head, and broke its stalk, and at night having lost some of its leaves and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and outworn faces. The same is the portion of every man and every woman, the heritage of worms and serpents, rottenness and cold dishonour, and our beauty so changed, that our acquaintance quickly knew us not ; and that change mingled with so much horror, or else meets so with our fears and weak discouragements, that they who six hours ago tended upon us either with charitable or ambitious services, cannot without some regret stay in the room alone where the body lies stripped of its life and honour. I have read of a fair young German gentleman who living often refused to be pictured, but put off the importunity of his friends' desire by giving way that after a few days' burial they might send a painter to his vault, and if they saw cause for it draw the image of his death unto the life : they did so, and found his face half eaten, and his midriff and backbone full of serpents ; and so he stands pictured among his armed ancestors. So does the fairest beauty change, and it will be as bad with you as me ; and then what servants shall we have to wait upon us in the grave ? what friends to visit us ? what officious people to cleanse away the moist and unwholesome cloud reflected upon our faces from the sides of the weeping vaults, which are the longest weepers for our funeral ? " <sup>1</sup>

Brought hither, like Hamlet to the burying-ground, amid the skulls which he recognises, and under the oppression of the death which he touches, man needs

<sup>1</sup> *Holy Dying*, ch. i. sec. ii. p. 270.

but a slight effort to see a new world arise in his heart. He seeks the remedy of his sadness in the idea of eternal justice, and implores it with a breadth of words which makes the prayer a hymn in prose, as beautiful as a work of art :—

“Eternal God, Almighty Father of men and angels, by whose care and providence I am preserved and blessed, comforted and assisted, I humbly beg of Thee to pardon the sins and follies of this day, the weakness of my services, and the strengths of my passions, the rashness of my words, and the vanity and evil of my actions. O just and dear God, how long shall I confess my sins, and pray against them, and yet fall under them? O let it be so no more; let me never return to the follies of which I am ashamed, which bring sorrow and death, and Thy displeasure, worse than death. Give me a command over my inclinations and a perfect hatred of sin, and a love to Thee above all the desires of this world. Be pleased to bless and preserve me this night from all sin and all violence of chance, and the malice of the spirits of darkness: watch over me in my sleep; and whether I sleep or wake, let me be Thy servant. Be Thou first and last in all my thoughts, and the guide and continual assistance of all my actions. Preserve my body, pardon the sin of my soul, and sanctify my spirit. Let me always live holily and soberly; and when I die receive my soul into Thy hands.”<sup>1</sup>

## V.

This was, however, but an imperfect Reformation, and the official religion was too closely bound up with the world to undertake to cleanse it thoroughly: if it repressed the excesses of vice, it did not attack its source; and the paganism of the Renaissance, following its bent, already under James I. issued in the corruption,

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Grove.*



*JEREMY TAYLOR*







orgie, disgusting, and drunken habits, provoking and gross sensuality,<sup>1</sup> which subsequently under the Restoration stank like a sewer in the sun. But underneath the established Protestantism was propagated the forbidden Protestantism: the yeomen were settling their faith like the gentlemen, and already the Puritans made headway under the Anglicans.

No culture here, no philosophy, no sentiment of harmonious and pagan beauty. Conscience alone spoke, and its restlessness had become a terror. The sons of the shopkeeper, of the farmer, who read the Bible in the barn or the counting-house, amid the barrels or the wool-bags, did not take matters as a handsome cavalier bred up in the old mythology, and refined by an elegant Italian education. They took them tragically, sternly examined themselves, pricked their hearts with their scruples, filled their imaginations with the vengeance of God and the terrors of the Bible. A gloomy epic, terrible and grand as the *Edda*, was fermenting in their melancholy imaginations. They steeped themselves in texts of Saint Paul, in the thundering menaces of the prophets; they burdened their minds with the pitiless doctrines of Calvin; they admitted that the majority of men were predestined to eternal damnation:<sup>2</sup> many believed that this multitude were criminal before their birth; that God willed, foresaw, provided for their ruin; that He designed their punishment from all eternity;

<sup>1</sup> See in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Thierry and Theodoret* the characters of Bawder, Protalyce, and Brunhalt. In *The Custom of the Country*, by the same authors, several scenes represent the inside of an infamous house,—a frequent thing, by the way, in the dramas of that time; but here the boarders in the house are men. See also their *Bele a Wife and have a Wife*.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, quoted by Haag, ii. 216, *Histoire des Dogmes Chrétiens*.

that He created them simply to give them up to it.<sup>1</sup> Nothing but grace can save the wretched creature, free grace, God's sheer favour, which He only grants to a few, and which He distributes not according to the struggles and works of men, but according to the arbitrary choice of His single and absolute will. We are "children of wrath," plague-stricken, and condemned from our birth; and wherever we look in all the expanse of heaven, we find but thunderbolts flashing to destroy us. Fancy, if you can, the effects of such an idea on solitary and morose minds, such as this race and climate generates. Several persons thought themselves damned, and went groaning about the streets; others hardly ever slept. They were beside themselves, always imagining that they felt the hand of God or the claw of the devil upon them. An extraordinary power, immense means of action, were suddenly opened up in the soul, and there was no barrier in the moral life, and no establishment in civil society which their efforts could not upset.

Forthwith private life was transformed. How could ordinary sentiments, natural and every-day notions of happiness and pleasure, subsist before such a conception? Suppose men condemned to death, not ordinary death, but the rack, torture, an infinitely horrible and infinitely extended torment, waiting for their sentence, and yet knowing that they had one chance in a thousand, in a hundred thousand, of pardon; could they still go on amusing themselves, taking an interest in the business or pleasure of the time? The azure heaven shines not for them, the sun warms them not, the beauty and sweetness of things have no attraction for them; they

<sup>1</sup> These were the Supralapsarians.

have lost the wont of laughter; they fasten inwardly, pale and silent, on their anguish and their expectation; they have but one thought: "Will the judge pardon me?" They anxiously probe the involuntary motions of their heart, which alone can reply, and the inner revelation, which alone can render them certain of pardon or ruin. They think that any other condition of mind is unholy, that recklessness and joy are monstrous, that every worldly recreation or preoccupation is an act of paganism, and that the true mark of a Christian is trepidation at the very idea of salvation. Thenceforth rigour and rigidity mark their manners. The Puritan condemns the stage, the assemblies, the world's pomps and gatherings, the court's gallantry and elegance, the poetical and symbolical festivals of the country, the May-poles days, the merry feasts, bell-rings, all the outlets by which sensuous or instinctive nature endeavoured to relieve itself. He gives them up, abandons recreations and ornaments, crops his hair closely, wears a simple sombre-hued coat, speaks through his nose, walks stiffly, with his eyes turned upwards, absorbed, indifferent to visible things. The external and natural man is abolished; only the inner and spiritual man survives; there remains of the soul only the ideas of God and conscience,—a conscience alarmed and diseased, but strict in every duty, attentive to the least requirements, disdaining the caution of worldly morality, inexhaustible in patience, courage, sacrifice, enthroning chastity on the domestic hearth, truth before the tribunals, honesty in the counting-house, labour in the workshop, everywhere a fixed determination to bear all and do all rather than fail in the least injunction of moral justice and Bible-law. The stoical energy, the

fundamental honesty of the race, were aroused at the appeal of an enthusiastic imagination; and these unbending characteristics were displayed in their entirety in conjunction with abnegation and virtue.

Another step, and this great movement passed from within to without, from individual manners to public institutions. Observe these people in their reading of the Bible, they apply to themselves the commands imposed on the Jews, and the prologues urge them to it. At the beginning of their Bibles the translator<sup>1</sup> places a table of the principal words in the Scripture, each with its definition and texts to support it. They read and weigh these words: "*Abomination* before God are Idoles, Images. Before whom the people do bow them selves." Is this precept observed? No doubt the images are taken away, but the queen has still a crucifix in her chapel, and is it not a remnant of idolatry to kneel down when taking the sacrament? "*Abrogacion*, that is to abolyshe, or to make of none effecte: And so the lawe of the commandementes whiche was in the decrees and ceremonies, is abolished. The sacrifices, festes, meates, and al outwarde ceremonies are abrogated, and all the order of priesthode is abrogated." Is this so, and how does it happen that the bishops still take upon themselves the right of prescribing faith, worship, and of tyrannising over Christian consciences? And have they not preserved in the organ-music, in the surplice of the priests, in the sign of the cross, in a hundred other practices, all these visible rites which God has declared profane? "*Abuses*. The abuses that

<sup>1</sup> *The Byble, nowe lately with greate industry and Diligēce recognised* (by Edm. Beke), Lond., by John Daye and William Seres, 1549, with Tyndale's *Prologues*.

be in the church ought to be corrected by the prynces. The ministers ought to preache against abuses. Any manner of mere tradicions of man are abuses." What, meanwhile, is their prince doing, and why does he leave abuses in the church? The Christian must rise and protest; we must purge the church from the pagan crust with which tradition has covered it.<sup>1</sup>

Such are the ideas conceived by these uncultivated minds. Fancy the simple folk, more capable by their simplicity of a sturdy faith, these freeholders, these big traders, who have sat on juries, voted at elections, deliberated, discussed in common private and public business, used to examine the law, the comparing of precedents, all the detail of juridical and legal procedure; bringing their lawyer's and pleader's training to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture, who, having once formed a conviction, employ for it the cold passion, the intractable obstinacy, the heroic sternness of the English character. Their precise and combative minds take the business in hand. Every one holds himself bound to be ready, strong, and well prepared to answer all such as shall demand a reason of his faith. Each one has his difficulty and conscientious scruple<sup>2</sup> about some portion of the liturgy or the official hierarchy; about

<sup>1</sup> Examination of Mr. Axton: "I can't consent to wear the surplice, it is against my conscience; I trust, by the help of God, I shall never put on that sleeve, which is a mark of the beast."—Examination of Mr. White, "a substantial citizen of London" (1572), accused of not going to the parish church: "The whole Scriptures are for destroying idolatry, and everything that belongs to it."—"Where is the place where these are forbidden?"—"In Deuteronomy and other places; . . . and God by Isaiah commandeth not to pollute ourselves with the garments of the image."

<sup>2</sup> One expression continually occurs: "Tenderness of conscience"—"a squeamish stomach"—"our weaker brethren."

the dignities of canons and archdeacons, or certain passages of the funeral service; about the sacramental bread or the reading of the apocryphal books in church; about plurality of benefices or the ecclesiastical square cap. They each oppose some point, all together the episcopacy and the retention of Romish ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> Then they are imprisoned, fined, put in the pillory; they have their ears cut off; their ministers are dismissed, hunted out, prosecuted.<sup>2</sup> The law declares that any one above the age of sixteen who for the space of a month shall refuse to attend the established worship, shall be imprisoned until such time as he shall submit; and if he does not submit at the end of three months, he shall be banished the kingdom; and if he returns, put to death. They allow this to go on, and show as much firmness in suffering as scruple in belief; for a tittle about receiving of the communion, sitting rather than kneeling, or standing rather than sitting, they give up their livings, their property, their liberty, their country. One Dr. Leighton was imprisoned fifteen weeks in a dog's kennel, without fire, roof, bed, and in irons: his hair and skin fell off; he was set in the pillory during the November frosts, then whipt, and branded on the forehead; his ears were cut off, his nose slit; he was shut up eight years in the Fleet, and thence cast into the common prison. Many went cheerfully to the stake. Religion with them was a covenant, that is, a treaty made with God, which must be kept in spite of everything, as a written engagement, to the letter, to the last syllable. An admirable and deplorable stiffness of an over-scrupulous conscience,

<sup>1</sup> The separation of the Anglicans and dissenters may be dated from 1564.

<sup>2</sup> 1592.



which made cavillers at the same time with believers, which was to make tyrants after it had made martyrs.

Between the two, it made fighting men. These men had become wonderfully wealthy and had increased in numbers in the course of eighty years, as is always the case with men who labour, live honestly, and pass their lives uprightly, sustained by a powerful source of action from within. Thenceforth they are able to resist, and they do resist when driven to extremities; they choose to have recourse to arms rather than be driven back to idolatry and sin. The Long Parliament assembles, defeats the king, purges religion; the dam is broken, the Independents are hurled above the Presbyterians, the fanatics above the mere zealots; irresistible and overwhelming faith, enthusiasm, grow into a torrent, swallow up, or at least disturb the strongest minds, politicians, lawyers, captains. The Commons occupy a day in every week in deliberating on the progress of religion. As soon as they touch upon doctrines they become furious. A poor man, Paul Best, being accused of denying the Trinity, they demand the passing of a decree to punish him with death; James Nayler having imagined that he was God, the Commons devote themselves to a trial of eleven days, with a Hebraic animosity and ferocity: "I think him worse than possessed with the devil. Our God is here supplanted. My ears trembled, my heart shuddered, on hearing this report. I will speak no more. Let us all stop our ears and stone him."<sup>1</sup> Before the House of Commons, publicly, the men in authority had ecstasies. After the expulsion of the Presbyterians, the preacher Hugh Peters started up in the middle of a sermon, and cried out: "Now I have

<sup>1</sup> Burton's *Parliamentary Diary*, ed. by Rutt, 1828, 4 vols. i. 54.

it by Revelation, now I shall tell you. This army must root up Monarchy, not only here, but in France and other kingdoms round about; this is to bring you out of Egypt: this Army is that corner-stone cut out of the Mountaine, which must dash the powers of the earth to pieces. But it is objected, the way we walk in is without president (*sic*); what think you of the Virgin Mary? was there ever any president before, that a Woman should conceive a Child without the company of a Man? This is an Age to make examples and presidents in.”<sup>1</sup> Cromwell found prophecies, counsels in the Bible for the present time, positive justifications of his policy. “He looked upon the Design of the Lord in this day to be the freeing of His People from every Burden, and that was now accomplishing what was prophesied in the 110th Psalm; from the Consideration of which he was often encouraged to attend the effecting those Ends, spending at least an hour in the Exposition of that Psalm.”<sup>2</sup> Granted that he was a schemer,

<sup>1</sup> Walker's *History of Independency*, 1648, part ii. p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> This passage may serve as an example of the difficulties and perplexities to which a translator of a History of Literature must always be exposed, and this without any fault of the original author. *Ab uno disce omnes*. M. Taine says that Cromwell found justification for his policy in Psalm cxiii., which, on looking out, I found to be “an exhortation to praise God for His excellency and for His mercy,”—a psalm by which Cromwell's conduct could nowise be justified. I opened then Carlyle's *Cromwell's Letters*, etc., and saw, in vol. ii. part vi. p. 157, the same fact stated, but Psalm cx. mentioned and given,—a far more likely psalm to have influenced Cromwell. Carlyle refers to *Ludlow*, i. 319, Taine to Guizot, *Portraits Politiques*, p. 63, and to Carlyle. In looking in Guizot's volume, 5th ed., 1862, I find that this writer also mentions Psalm cxiii.; but on referring finally to the *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, printed at Vivay (*sic*) in the Canton of Bern, 1698, I read, in vol. i. p. 319, the sentence, as given above; therefore Carlyle was right.—Th.

above all ambitious, yet he was truly fanatical and sincere. His doctor related that he had been very melancholy for years at a time, with strange hallucinations, and the frequent fancy that he was at death's door. Two years before the Revolution he wrote to his cousin: "Truly no poor creature hath more cause to put himself forth in the cause of his God than I. . . . The Lord accept me in His Son, and give me to walk in the light—and give us to walk in the light, as He is the light! . . . blessed be His Name for shining upon so dark a heart as mine!"<sup>1</sup> Certainly he must have dreamed of becoming a saint as well as a king, and aspired to salvation as well as to a throne. At the moment when he was proceeding to Ireland, and was about to massacre the Catholics there, he wrote to his daughter-in-law a letter of advice which Baxter or Taylor might willingly have subscribed. In the midst of pressing affairs, in 1651, he thus exhorted his wife: "My dearest, I could not satisfy myself to omit this post, although I have not much to write. . . . It joys me to hear thy soul prospereth: the Lord increase His favours to thee more and more. The great good thy soul can wish is, That the Lord lift upon thee the light of His countenance, which is better than life. The Lord bless all thy good counsel and example to all those about thee, and hear all thy prayers, and accept thee always."<sup>2</sup> Dying, he asked whether grace once received could be lost, and was reassured to learn that it could not, being, as he said, certain that he had once been in a state of grace. He died with this prayer: "Lord, though I am a miserable and wretched creature, I am

<sup>1</sup> *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ed. Carlyle, 1866, 3 vols. i. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, ii. 273.

in Covenant with Thee through grace. And I may, I will, come to Thee, for Thy People. Thou hast made me, though very unworthy, a mean instrument to do them some good, and Thee service. . . . Lord, however Thou do dispose of me, continue and go on to do good for them . . . and go on . . . with the work of reformation; and make the Name of Christ glorious in the world."<sup>1</sup> Underneath this practical, prudent, worldly spirit, there was an English element of anxious and powerful imagination, capable of engendering an impassioned Calvinism and mystic fears.<sup>2</sup> The same contrasts were jumbled together and reconciled in the other Independents. In 1648, after unsuccessful tactics, they were in danger between the king and the Parliament; then they assembled for several days together at Windsor to confess themselves to God, and seek His assistance; and they discovered that all their evils came from the conferences they had had the weakness to propose to the king. "And in this path the Lord led us," said Adjutant Allen, "not only to see our sin, but also our duty; and this so unanimously set with weight upon each heart that none was able hardly to speak a word to each other for bitter weeping, partly in the sense and shame of our iniquities; of our unbelief, base fear of men, and carnal consultations (as the fruit thereof) with our own wisdoms, and not with the Word of the Lord."<sup>3</sup> Thereupon they resolved to bring the king to judgment and death, and did as they had resolved.

Around them, fanaticism and folly gained ground.

<sup>1</sup> *Cromwell's Letters*, ed. Carlyle, iii. 373.

<sup>2</sup> See his speeches. The style is disjointed, obscure, impassioned, out of the common, like that of a man who is not master of his wits, and who yet sees straight by a sort of intuition.

<sup>3</sup> *Cromwell's Letters*, i. 265.

Independents, Millenarians, Antinomians, Anabaptists, Libertines, Familists, Quakers, Enthusiasts, Seekers, Perfectionists, Socinians, Arians, anti-Trinitarians, anti-Scripturalists, Sceptics ; the list of sects is interminable. Women, soldiers, suddenly got up into the pulpit and preached. The strangest ceremonies took place in public. In 1644, says Dr. Featly, the Anabaptists rebaptised a hundred men and women together at twilight, in streams, in branches of the Thames, and elsewhere, plunging them in the water over head and ears. One Oates, in the county of Essex, was brought before a jury for the murder of Anne Martin, who died a few days after her baptism of a cold which had seized her. George Fox the Quaker spoke with God, and witnessed with a loud voice, in the streets and market-places, against the sins of the age. William Simpson, one of his disciples, "was moved of the Lord to go, at several times, for three years, naked and barefoot before them, as a sign unto them, in the markets, courts, towns, cities, to priests' houses, and to great men's houses, telling them, so shall they all be stripped naked, as he was stripped naked. And sometime he was moved to put on hair sackcloth, and to besmear his face, and to tell them, so would the Lord besmear all their religion as he was besmeared."<sup>1</sup>

"A female came into Whitehall Chapel stark naked, in the midst of public worship, the Lord Protector himself being present. A Quaker came to the door of the Parliament House with a drawn sword, and wounded several who were present, saying that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to kill every man that sat in the house." The Fifth Monarchy men believed that Christ

<sup>1</sup> *A Journal of the Life, etc., of that Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, George Fox, 6th edit., 1836.*

was about to descend to reign in person upon earth for a thousand years, with the saints for His ministers. The Ranters looked upon furious vociferations and contortions as the principal signs of faith. The Seekers thought that religious truth could only be seized in a sort of mystical fog, with doubt and fear. The Muggletonians decided that "John Reeve and Ludovick Muggleton were the two last prophets and messengers of God;" they declared the Quakers possessed of the devil, exorcised him, and prophesied that William Penn would be damned. I have before mentioned James Nayler, an old quartermaster of General Lambert, adored as a god by his followers. Several women led his horse, others cast before him their kerchiefs and scarves, singing, Holy, holy, Lord God. They called him "lovely among ten thousand, the only Son of God, the prophet of the Most High, King of Israel, the eternal Son of Justice, the Prince of Peace, Jesus, him in whom the hope of Israel rests." One of them, Dorcas Erbury, declared that she had lain dead for two whole days in her prison in Exeter Gaol, and that Nayler had restored her to life by laying his hands upon her. Sarah Blackbury finding him a prisoner, took him by the hand and said, "Rise up my love, my dove, my fairest one: why stayest thou among the pots?" Then she kissed his hand and fell down before him. When he was put in the pillory, some of his disciples began to sing, weep, smite their breasts; others kissed his hands, rested on his bosom, and kissed his wounds.<sup>1</sup> Bedlam broken loose could not have surpassed them.

Underneath the surface and these disorderly bubbles

<sup>1</sup> Burton's *Parliamentary Diary*, i. 46-173. Neal, *History of the Puritans*, iii, Suppl.

the wise and deep strata of the nation had settled, and the new faith was doing its work with them,—a practical and positive, a political and moral work. Whilst the German Reformation, after the German wont, resulted in great volumes and a scholastic system, the English Reformation, after the English wont, resulted in action and establishment. "How the Church of Christ shall be governed;" that was the great question which was discussed among the sects. The House of Commons asked the Assembly of Divines: If the classical, provincial, and local assemblies were *jure divino*, and instituted by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ? If they were all so? If only some were so, and which? If appeals carried by the elders of a congregation to provincial, departmental, and national assemblies were *jure divino*, and according to the will and appointment of Jesus Christ? If some only were *jure divino*? And which? If the power of the assemblies in such appeals was *jure divino*, and by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ? and a hundred other questions of the same kind. Parliament declared that, according to Scripture, the dignities of priest and bishop were equal; it regulated ordinations, convocations, excommunications, jurisdictions, elections; spent half its time and exerted all its power in establishing the Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup> So, with the Independents, fervour engendered courage and discipline. "Cromwell's regiment of horse were most of them freeholders' sons, who engaged in the war upon principles of conscience; and that being well armed within, by the satisfaction of their consciences, and without with good iron arms, they would as one man stand firmly and charge desper-

<sup>1</sup> See Neal, *Hist. of the Puritans*, ii. 418-450.

ately.”<sup>1</sup> This army, in which inspired corporals preached to lukewarm colonels, acted with the solidity and precision of a Russian regiment: it was a duty, a duty towards God, to fire straight and march in good order; and a perfect Christian made a perfect soldier. There was no separation here between theory and practice, between private and public life, between the spiritual and the temporal. They wished to apply Scripture to “establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth,” to institute not only a Christian Church, but a Christian Society, to change the law into a guardian of morals, to compel men to piety and virtue; and for a while they succeeded in it. “Though the discipline of the church was at an end, there was nevertheless an uncommon spirit of devotion among people in the parliament quarters; the Lord’s day was observed with remarkable strictness, the churches being crowded with numerous and attentive hearers three or four times in the day; the officers of the peace patrolled the streets, and shut up all publick houses; there was no travelling on the road, or walking in the fields, except in cases of absolute necessity. Religious exercises were set up in private families, as reading the Scriptures, family prayer, repeating sermons, and singing of psalms, which was so universal, that you might walk through the city of London on the evening of the Lord’s day, without seeing an idle person, or hearing anything but the voice of prayer or praise from churches and private houses.”<sup>2</sup> People would rise before daybreak, and walk a great dis-

<sup>1</sup> Whitlocke’s *Memorials*, i. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Neal, ii. 553. Compare with the French Revolution. When the Bastille was demolished, they wrote on the ruins these words: “Ici l’on danse.” From this contrast we see the difference between the two systems and the two nations.



tance to be able to hear the word of God. "There were no gaming-houses, or houses of pleasure; no profane swearing, drunkenness, or any kind of debauchery."<sup>1</sup> The Parliamentary soldiers came in great numbers to listen to sermons, spoke of religion, prayed and sang psalms together, when on duty. In 1644 Parliament forbade the sale of commodities on Sunday, and ordained "that no person shall travel, or carry a burden, or do any worldly labour, upon penalty of 10s. for the traveller, and 5s. for every burden. That no person shall on the Lord's day use, or be present at, any wrestling, shooting, fowling, ringing of bells for pleasure, markets, wakes, church-ales, dancing, games or sports whatsoever, upon penalty of 5s. to every one above fourteen years of age. And if children are found offending in the premises, their parents or guardians to forfeit 12d. for every offence. If the several fines above mentioned cannot be levied, the offending party shall be set in the stocks for the space of three hours." When the Independents were in power, severity became still greater. The officers in the army, having convicted one of their quartermasters of blasphemy, condemned him to have his tongue bored with a red-hot iron, his sword broken over his head, and himself to be dismissed from the army. During Cromwell's expedition in Ireland, we read that no blasphemy was heard in the camp; the soldiers spent their leisure hours in reading the Bible, singing psalms, and holding religious controversies. In 1650 the punishments inflicted on Sabbath-breakers were doubled. Stern laws were passed against betting, gallantry was reckoned a crime; the theatres were destroyed, the spectators fined, the actors

<sup>1</sup> Neal, *Hist. of the Puritans*, ii. 555.

whipt at the cart's tail; adultery punished with death: in order to reach crime more surely, they persecuted pleasure. But if they were austere against others, they were so against themselves, and practised the virtues they exacted. After the Restoration, two thousand ministers, rather than conform to the new liturgy, resigned their cures, though they and their families had to die of hunger. Many of them, says Baxter, thinking that they were not justified in quitting their ministry after being set apart for it by ordination, preached to such as would hear them in the fields and in certain houses, until they were seized and thrown into prisons, where a great number of them perished. Cromwell's fifty thousand veterans, suddenly disbanded and without resources, did not bring a single recruit to the vagabonds and bandits. "The Royalists themselves confessed that, in every department of honest industry, the discarded warriors prospered beyond other men, that none was charged with any theft or robbery, that none was heard to ask an alms, and that, if a baker, a mason, or a waggoner, attracted notice by his diligence and sobriety, he was in all probability one of Oliver's old soldiers."<sup>1</sup> Purified by persecution and ennobled by patience, they ended by winning the tolerance of the law and the respect of the public, and raised national morality, as they had saved national liberty. But others, exiles in America, pushed to the extreme this great religious and stoical spirit, with its weaknesses and its power, with its vices and its virtues. Their determination, intensified by a fervent faith, employed in political and practical pursuits, invented the science of emigration, made exile tolerable, drove back the Indians,

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay, *Hist. of England*, ed. Lady Trevelyan, i. 121.